QANTAS SOCCEROOS v INDONESIA

QANTAS WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2010, SUNCORP STADIUM

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AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 16 $10

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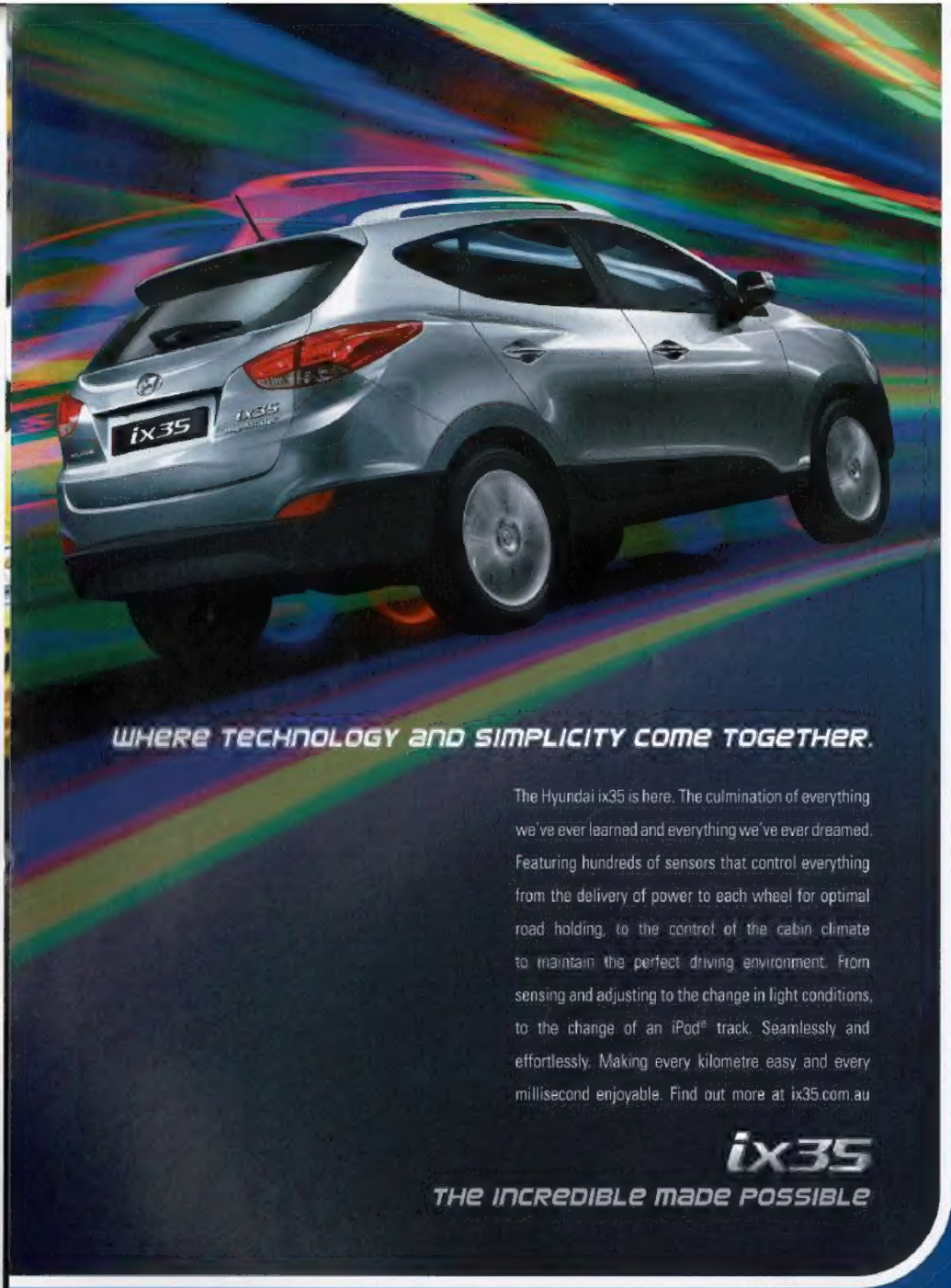

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Welcome INDONESIA

FFA Chairman Frank Lowy AC

Australia and tonight's opponent Indonesia will be seeing a lot more of each other after signing an agreement to form closer football ties.

Welcome to our final Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup 2011 qualification match here at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane.

In particular, I would like to welcome our very special guests and close friends from Indonesia.

Our nations first played against each other on November 17, 1967, and since then have met on 14 occasions which includes some memorable FIFA World Cup qualifiers in 1973 and 1981.

Recently, FFA signed a landmark agreement with the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI) to form closer football ties between our organisations, which includes a raft of exchange programs and more internationals in the future at all levels of the game.

Under our five-year agreement, we will assist the PSSI with the development of their coaches, players, referees, grassroots football and women's football programs, and will host training visits for representative players, coaches and officials.

In return, the PSSI will assist the FFA to become fully integrated into south-east Asian football and the ASEAN Football Federation and provide competition for Australian national teams at a range of age levels and formats.

In addition, FFA also made a substantial contribution to the AFC's Vision Asia program, which promotes the development of football in Asia.

Both FFA and our Indonesian partners have also agreed to encourage our respective national governments to consider football as a vehicle to increase cooperation at political, social, economic and environmental levels.

Since joining the AFC in 2006, FFA has worked hard to promote closer bonds with nations around the world using 'football' as a common denominator.

In closing, I would like to thank all our partners for their ongoing support, especially in relation to tonight's match. My best wishes to both teams for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match for all.

Frank Lowy AC
CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

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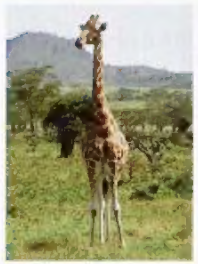

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KICK OFF

The latest Australian football news, interviews and mores.

FALLING HERO Adelaide United goalscorer Mathew Leckie takes a tumble.

Champions back in business

The 2010 AFC Champions League kicked off last week.

Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United experienced mixed fortunes in the opening games of their 2010 AFC Champions League campaign last week. While the Victory went down 1-0 away to Beijing Guoan, with the only goal scored by Australian Joel Griffiths, the Reds continued their love affair with the competition with a 1-0 victory over Pohang Steelers.

Missing several of its best players through injury, including Archie Thompson and Robbie Kruse, Melbourne struggled for large parts of the match at the Beijing Workers Stadium, rarely troubling the Chinese side's goalkeeper Yang Zhi.

At the other end, Griffiths proved the difference in a masterful individual display. The former Newcastle Jets star, who averages a goal every two games against the Victory, made the breakthrough after 50 minutes, skipping past Kevin Muscat and Rody Vargas before beating keeper Mitch Langerak.

In Group E's other game, Korean side Seongnam Ilhwa beat Japan's Kawasaki Frontale 2-0.

It was a contrasting story at Hindmarsh Stadium. Adelaide may have finished bottom of the Hyundai A-League this season, but it tore apart the formbook against the Steelers, who won this tournament last year. Mathew Leckie, who is in the Qantas Socceroos squad for tonight's game, was the hero, grabbing the only goal on the stroke of half-time.

The speedy teenager ran almost the length of the field, beating several Korean players, before capitalising on some hesitation by defender Hee Chul to stab the ball home. The Reds, who twice defeated Pohang in 2008 on their way to the final of this competition, held on for the three points.

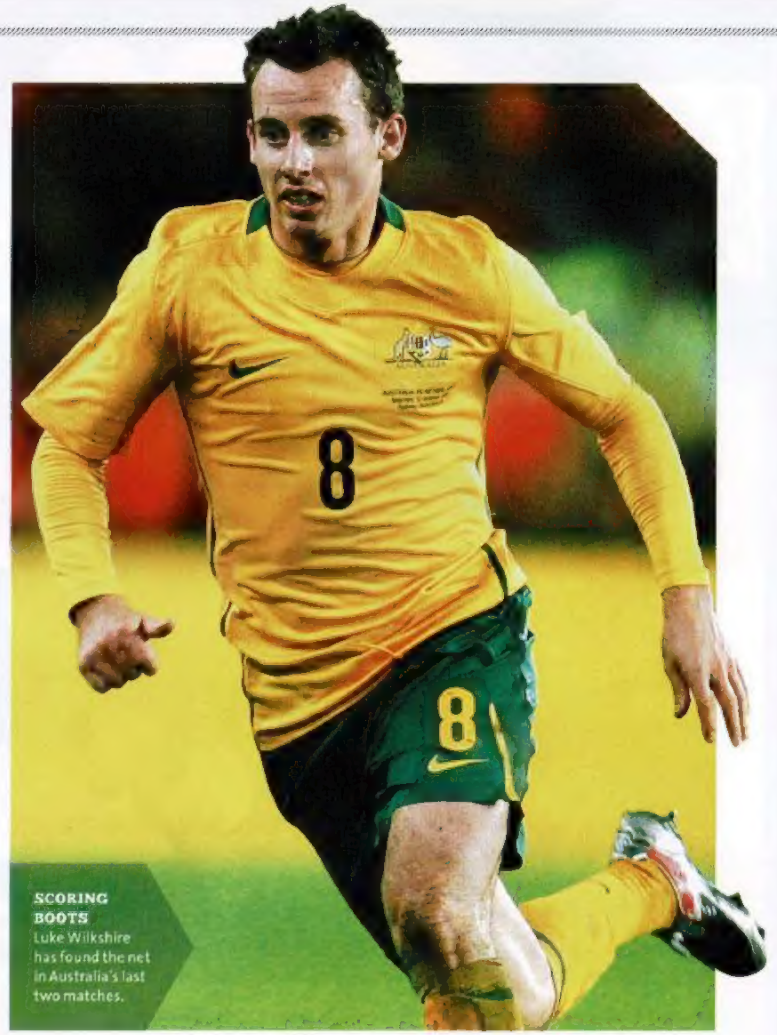
China's Shandong Luneng defeated Japan's Sanfrecce Hiroshima 1-0 in Group H's other match.

Melbourne's next AFC Champions League match will be against Seongnam Ilhwa at Etihad Stadium on March 9, while Adelaide will play Shandong on March 10.

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the knockout phase.

One on one

Luke Wilkshire is happy to do a job for Australia – in any position.



SCORING BOOTS
Luke Wilkshire has found the net in Australia's last two matches.

Pim Verbeek has played you in several positions over the last two years. Where is your favourite position? Are you happy to play anywhere for the team?
I don't have a favourite position. Whether it's playing at the back or in the middle, I don't mind as long as I'm on the field. I really enjoy playing for the national team and wherever the coach wants me to play, I'll do the job asked of me.

You scored in the Qantas Socceroos' last two games, your first two goals for your country. Do you think the coach might move you up forward next?
There's no need to move me further up front if I'm scoring goals from where I am now. It took me a while to get the first one for the Qantas Socceroos, but that's not the main focus of my game. If I get a chance to score in the future, I'll take it, but Josh (Kennedy) doesn't need to lose sleep over me taking his spot.

How important is qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup to the Qantas Socceroos?
Qualification for the AFC Asian Cup is extremely important to us. It's the major tournament of the confederation and we want to be successful at it. Competitive tournaments like this give players the experience to perform on the world stage.

What are your thoughts on Australia's group in the FIFA World Cup?
There's no doubt that we have a tough group, but then again there are no easy matches at a FIFA World Cup. We're up for the challenge. You go to a World Cup to play against the best in the world and, with the experience that we gained from Germany, we will be better prepared this time.

We have a tough group, but then again there are no easy matches at a FIFA World Cup.

It was a wonderful journey four years ago. What are your expectations this time?
Having been to the last World Cup, we have an understanding of what is involved, but in South Africa there are things that will be totally different like the weather conditions, altitude and grounds. It's up to us to adapt to the challenges, but personally I'm really looking forward to it.

You recently signed a new three-year deal with your club Dynamo Moscow. You must be enjoying life in Russia?
I'm very happy and settled and so is my family. The club has been brilliant to us and looked after us very well. At the moment I'm enjoying life and my football, which is the key to happiness.

You've played in several European countries. Do you plan to finish your career back home in Australia?
At the moment I have three more seasons left in Russia, so I'm not thinking beyond that. But in football you never know what is around the corner, so we'll see what happens when the time comes.

News Bites

What's been making headlines on and off the field.

KING CARLOS

Melbourne Victory star Carlos Hernandez was the toast of the town when he won the Johnny Warren Medal at the Hyundai A-League 2009/10 Awards Ceremony on February 15. He was a comfortable winner of the best player award, voted for by the players, polling 673 votes ahead of Gold Coast United's Shane Smeltz (431) and Wellington Phoenix's Paul Ifill (311).

Hernandez celebrated his award by scoring in Melbourne's 2-1 win over Sydney FC in the first leg of the Hyundai A-League Major Semi-Final four days later.

There was a triple celebration for Melbourne with Ernie Merrick being named the Coach of the Year, and Archie Thompson taking out the SOLO Goal of the Year award for his stunning round 16 effort against Gold Coast.

Other winners on the night were Adelaide United's Eugene Galekovic, named Goalkeeper of the Year for the second season in a row, Brisbane Roar's Tommy Roar, the NAB Young Player of the Year, and Smeltz who was the runaway winner of the Reebok Golden Boot award with 19 goals.

VALE

Former Socceroo Ian Gray died on February 15, aged 46. Born in 1963, Gray made his name at Marconi in the NSL, where he won three titles.

Gray won 14 caps for the Qantas Socceroos, and featured in the qualifying stages for the 1986 and 1994 FIFA World Cups. In 2004, Gray was inducted into the FFA Hall of Fame.

ALL OVER
Injury brought a premature end to Steve Corica's final season with Sydney.

NEW CHALLENGE

After a decade of coaching roles with the Qantas Socceroos, Graham Arnold will leave his post as assistant coach to become the new coach of Central Coast Mariners for the 2010/11 season, replacing Lawrie McKinna, it was announced on February 9.

Appointed assistant coach of the Qantas Socceroos and Qantas Olyroos in 2000, Arnold held the position on and off for 10 years, and was the nation's head coach for the 2007 AFC Asian Cup. He will start work with the Mariners at the end of the Qantas Socceroos' FIFA World Cup campaign.

"Graham has been a fantastic servant to the Qantas Socceroos as a player and in a coaching capacity," FFA CEO Ben Buckley said.

"Graham's current coaching contract with FFA is set to conclude at the end of the 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign, and although we are disappointed that he will no longer be involved with the national team, we wish him all the best for his new challenge."

One of the most qualified coaches in Australia, Arnold, who holds an A-licence, is currently studying for his FFA Pro Coaching licence.

CORICA CALLS IT QUITS

Sydney FC captain Steve Corica experienced the highs and lows of football last month – in the space of a couple of days. Two days after lifting the premier's plate following the Sky Blues' 2-0 win over Melbourne Victory, the veteran announced his retirement after suffering a serious hamstring injury in the win.

The enforced decision to hang up his boots came a month earlier than expected after Corica had revealed the previous week he would retire at the conclusion of Sydney's finals campaign.

Corica, 36, played 107 Hyundai A-League games for the club, scoring 23 goals, including the winning goal in the 2006 Grand Final. After playing for Marconi in the NSL from 1990/95, he went on to play for Leicester, Wolves and Walsall in England, as well as a two-season stint with Japanese side Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

Corica represented Australia at all levels and won 32 caps for the senior team, scoring five goals.

He is expected to remain at Sydney in a coaching role next season.

TAKING HEART

Five months before it makes its Hyundai A-League bow, Melbourne Heart's squad is slowly starting to take shape. Several big-name players have committed their future to the competition's 11th team in recent months, with others tipped to follow suit. After Newcastle Jets skipper Matt Thompson and Adelaide United midfielder Kristian Sarkies committed to the club in early November, Qantas Socceroo Dean Heffernan signed up later that month. Another Jet, Jason Hoffman, put pen to paper in January and Sydney FC keeper Clint Bolton became the Heart's latest major signing last month.

PLAYERS' CHOICE
Melbourne Victory's Carlos Hernandez won the Johnny Warren Medal, as voted by his peers.

Football Matters

Latest news from inside the FFA.

CALLING ALL NOMINATIONS

Nominations for the 2010 Australian Football Awards are now open. The Australian Football Awards celebrate and reward outstanding achievements and contributions of the football family to our game. From players at a professional level through to teams, volunteers, coaches and referees at a non-professional level, the awards recognise the many and varied ways people are involved in our game.

Public nominations are now open for Team of the Year. This award is open to any team which is part of a club registered with FFA, across all age groups. Teams may nominate online until 5pm AEDT on March 26, 2010.

TOP TEAM
Lilli Pilli FC U16A, the 2009 Team of the Year.

See *footballaustralia.com.au/footballawards* for more information, including how to nominate for other categories.

Winners of the 2010 Australian Football Awards will be announced at a gala ceremony in Melbourne on May 22, 2010.

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UNBEATABLE
Unlike four years ago, Mark Schwarzer is a certain starter as Australia's goalkeeper going into the FIFA World Cup.

THE GLOVES ARE OFF

With Mark Schwarzer the undisputed first choice for the Qantas Socceroos, there are at least seven other candidates fighting for the remaining two spots in South Africa. MICHAEL LYNCH *assesses the contenders.*

Mark Schwarzer might best be described as Australian football's version of Old Man River – like the Mississippi in the wonderful Paul Robeson tune from the classic American musical *Show Boat*, the veteran shot stopper just keeps rolling along.

The Fulham goalkeeper is well into his 38th year but, barring injury, illness or some other catastrophe, he will be Australia's undisputed No. 1 when the Qantas Socceroos take the field against Germany in Durban in June for their 2010 FIFA World Cup opener.

It's sobering to realise just how long Schwarzer has been involved in the Australian side. He made his debut 17 years ago in a FIFA World Cup qualifier in Edmonton, Canada, coming off the bench when Robert Zabica was sent off. Schwarzer really covered himself with glory in the return leg in Sydney when he saved two penalties in the shootout win over the Canadians. That result sent Australia to the final play-off against Argentina, which it subsequently lost.

Several keepers play overseas, but there are a handful locally based.

It wasn't all plain sailing, of course. When Mark Bosnich, then of Aston Villa and Manchester United, was preferred as No. 1 by Terry Venables, Schwarzer made himself unavailable for selection.

But when Frank Farina took charge in 1999, the tall Sydneysider was back on the scene and quickly established himself as the first choice, a position he has held under Farina, Guus Hiddink, Graham Arnold and now Pim Verbeek.

Along the way, he has seen off several challengers for his spot. The most consistent rival was his long-time sparring partner Zeljko Kalac. The two had grown up together as juniors in the Sydney soccer scene and had always battled for top spot in local and representative sides.

When it came to the national team, Kalac more often than not had to play second fiddle, although Hiddink famously preferred him in that crucial 2006 FIFA World Cup match against Croatia in Stuttgart. The decision had disastrous results as the big man conceded in the third minute and then fluffed a Niko Kovac long shot to hand the Croatians the lead again in the second half. Harry Kewell spared Australia's – and Kalac's – blushes with an equaliser with 10 minutes remaining.

Other potential rivals simply gave up trying. Joey Didulica, the Geelong-born and raised goalkeeper who was long thought to be an heir apparent as he made his name at Ajax Amsterdam, got fed up waiting for the chance. When Croatia, the country of his parents' birth, offered him the chance to go to the 2004 European Championships and 2006 FIFA World Cup as one of their back-up keepers, he jumped at the opportunity, even though he has hardly played for the Balkan nation since.

With Schwarzer still going strong, one of the more intriguing questions as Verbeek ponders his squad for South Africa surrounds who the back-up goalkeepers will be.

As the incumbent hardly misses a game – Schwarzer is one of the more committed Qantas Socceroos and makes himself available at almost every opportunity – few others have been given the chance to impress.

Verbeek can take two others with him to South Africa, and there are plenty of candidates for him to consider with Australia's goalkeeping coach Tony Franken.

Several keepers play overseas, but there are a handful locally based.

Some are very experienced and have been around the international scene for many years, while others are relative greenhorns at senior level, albeit with experience in junior FIFA World Cups or Olympic Games.

MICHAEL PETKOVIC

The Perth-born goalkeeper (brother of another former Qantas Socceroo shot stopper Jason Petkovic) made his name in the NSL with powerhouse club South Melbourne. 'Petka', as he is universally known, was the team's goalkeeper in its back-to-back championships in 1998 and 1999, but didn't play in the World Club Championship in 2000 because by then he had joined French club Strasbourg.

Things didn't work out in France, so he returned to South for another two seasons before moving to Turkey in 2002 where he enjoyed a successful three years with Trabzonspor before joining his current club Sivasspor in 2005.

Tall and powerful, the 190cm Petkovic is, at 33, reaching the peak of his powers as a goalkeeper. He has made six appearances for Australia and has figured in several training camps and match-day squads under Verbeek.

He made his debut in Bogata in a 2-3 loss to Colombia back in 2001 (the same game in which Melbourne Victory's Archie Thompson first figured for Australia) and his last start was against China in the 1-0 home loss in a FIFA World Cup qualifier in June 2008.

SAFE HANDS
Eugene Galekovic has been named the Hyundai A-League's best goalkeeper in the past two seasons.

IN HIS PRIME
Michael Petkovic, seen here in action for Australia against Denmark in 2007, has won six Qantas Socceroo caps.

EUGENE GALEKOVIC

The 28-year-old Adelaide United shot stopper is used to proving the experts wrong. In 2004, he went to the training camp for the Athens Olympics with most judges regarding him as the second-choice keeper, behind Middlebrough's Bradley Jones.

So good was his form that he displaced Jones and became the Olyroos' No. 1 in the tournament. Two years later, Melbourne Victory boss Ernie Merrick chose Michael Theoklitos over Galekovic, and let the Melburnian leave to join Adelaide United.

Since then, Galekovic has won two Goalkeeper of the Year awards in the Hyundai A-League as well as his first Qantas Socceroo caps. Now he is looking to become one of the few locally based players to get into Pim Verbeek's squad for South Africa.

Another powerful keeper, Galekovic is a good shot stopper and, as he has matured, has become a commanding figure in his penalty area and at organising his defence and sweeping up. He made his national team debut against Indonesia in an AFC Asian Cup qualifer last January, and was also in between the sticks in Australia's most recent outing – the 2-2 draw in Kuwait two months ago.

Galekovic has experienced plenty of big-time football – he was Adelaide's custodian as it marched all the way to the AFC Champions League Final in 2008, although he was suspended from the second leg of the final defeat to Gamba Osaka.

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ON THE RISE
Adam Federici is reaping the rewards of getting regular game time in England.

EMERGING TALENT
Bradley Jones has stepped out of Mark Schwarzer's shadow in recent seasons.

ADAM FEDERICI

One of the younger of Australia's goalkeeping hopefuls, Federici is in a strong position to claim a spot at the 2010 FIFA World Cup because he is playing regularly at a decent level – with Reading, in the English Championship.

The Nowra-born goalkeeper turned 25 in January so is still some way off the peak age for a goalkeeper, but he is making a good impression. He starred for Reading in the FA Cup against Manchester United last year and Liverpool this season, and impressed as one of the few standouts for Australia when he played for the Qantas Olyroos at the Beijing Olympics in a difficult group in which Australia played Serbia, Ivory Coast and Argentina.

Although Federici is yet to play for the Qantas Socceroos, he has been part of several international squads.

EXPERIENCED
Ante Covic was the third-choice goalkeeper in Guus Hiddink's squad for the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

ANTE COVIC

Another tall, strong goalkeeper, Covic has already tasted life at the top having been the third wheel in Guus Hiddink's goalkeeper selection for the 2006 FIFA World Cup, backing up first-choice Mark Schwarzer and his deputy Zeljko Kalac. His selection surprised many because the Sydneysider – who began life as an outfield player – did not figure on the international radar until August 2005 when Hiddink, recently appointed, included him in one of his first training camps as he looked to evaluate several players.

After beginning his career at Hurstville, Apia Leichardt and Marconi in NSW, Covic, who turns 35 on the day Australia takes on Germany in its opening 2010 FIFA World Cup match, has had an eventful career. He has spent significant time in Sweden, where he moved in 2002 when he joined Hammarby. Before that, he had spells in Greece, with PAOK and Kavala.

Covic made his Qantas Socceroos debut in a 3-1 win in an AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bahrain in 2006 and, after the FIFA World Cup, came home to play for Newcastle Jets, winning the Hyundai A-League title in the 2007/08 season. However, the Jets' form slumped the following season and Covic took up an offer to go back to Sweden and play with IF Elsborg, where he remains.

BRADLEY JONES

Now 27, the Perth-born goalkeeper has been around for a long time, almost always in the shadow cast by Schwarzer. Jones was Schwarzer's long-time understudy at Middlesbrough and often deputised for the Australian star in the English Premiership when he was injured. But when Schwarzer left to go to Fulham, Jones was not quite able to nail a first-team spot at Middlesbrough because of some erratic performances, and he has been in and out of the team since.

All up, Jones has been at Middlesbrough for a decade, but has also had loan spells in the English lower divisions at Stockport County, Sheffield Wednesday, Blackpool and Rotherham United, although most of those took place earlier in his career.

Jones made his senior international debut against Uruguay in Sydney in 2007, as part of the 2007 AFC Asian Cup warm-up series when Graham Arnold was the senior coach. It was marred by a clanger, however, as he dropped a cross, allowing Alvaro Recoba to score in a 2-1 defeat for Australia.

DANNY VUKOVIC

Not many goalkeepers manage to save a penalty on debut – for the shot stopper, it's probably the equivalent of a striker notching a hat-trick on his first appearance – but that's exactly what Vukovic did in his first start in the Hyundai A-League for Central Coast Mariners in the 2005/06 season.

He kept out Archie Thompson's spot kick, but unfortunately for Vukovic, the front man reacted quickly and was able to knock home the rebound.

Vukovic only came in to the Mariners team on game day after first-choice John Crawley suffered a career-ending injury and, by and large, he has been between the posts for the Gosford club since. That has included losing two Hyundai A-League Grand Finals – the inaugural decider against Sydney and the 2008 showdown with local rival Newcastle Jets.

That is a match Vukovic will never forget. The Jets won,

YOUTH OR EXPERIENCE?

Michael Lynch gives his verdict on who will get the nod for South Africa.

Pim Verbeek faces an interesting choice ahead of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Does he opt for experience and big-game know-how in his back-up goalkeepers, or will he have one eye on the future and take a younger or less experienced man to give him a taste of the big time?

Guus Hiddink did that in 2006 when he took the little-known Ante Covic to Germany – the Swedish-based shot stopper never got a game.

Michael Petkovic has been around for a long time and has been part of the squad on many occasions. He is also used to the demands of tournament play, having been one of the goalkeepers at the 2005 FIFA Confederations Cup in Germany. He is one of the favourites to take the role of second goalkeeper this time.

After that, it's anyone's guess. Playing regularly is a big advantage, and that is something Adam Federici is now doing at English Championship struggler Reading. Federici is one of the up-and-comers and would benefit greatly from the experience. He showed he had the right temperament at the Beijing Olympics.

Eugene Galekovic is another who is playing regularly and has impressed greatly in the last two years. His selection would be a boost for the Hyundai A-League, and his cause will be helped by the fact that Adelaide United is engaged in the AFC Champions League, so he will be playing and training right through to May. Galekovic also has tournament experience, having been Frank Farina's No. 1 choice when the Olyroos advanced to the quarter-finals in the 2004 Athens Olympics.

These men appear to be the leading contenders behind Mark Schwarzer.

Things could all be very different in Qatar in 2011, however, assuming Australia gets the result it needs tonight. Schwarzer is unlikely to continue at international level, and there is a good chance that a new generation of shot stoppers, headed by the likes of Melbourne Victory's Mitch Langerak, Central Coast Mariners' Danny Vukovic and Perth Glory's Tando Velaphi, will be pressing their cases for a spot in the AFC Asian Cup squad.

THE FUTURE
Perth Glory's Tando Velaphi will be pushing for selection in years to come.

SEALED WITH A KISS
Danny Vukovic celebrates the Qantas Olyroos' qualifying win over Iraq in 2007.

and he was sent off in the last minute for making contact with referee Mark Shield. It was a red card which was to have enormous consequences for the young Vukovic, as his subsequent hefty fine and lengthy international ban proved. The suspension meant that he was unable to go to the Beijing Olympics where most likely Vukovic, not Federici, would have been first choice.

He has shown plenty of character to bounce back and has been part of the senior squad for several AFC Asian Cup qualifiers, although he is yet to win his first cap. Vukovic turns 25 later this month, and has been one of the most consistent keepers in the Hyundai A-League, despite the Mariners' lowly place on the table this season.

CLINT BOLTON

Bolton's prowess – he kept 11 clean sheets in the regular Hyundai A-League season – helped Sydney to its first premier's plate. But win, lose or draw in the finals series, Bolton, 34, who is a foundation player for the Sky Blues, will be lining up against them next season as he has signed a deal to become the goalkeeper for new franchise Melbourne Heart.

A surprise selection for the Indonesian squad, Bolton's international future looked to be behind him as he had not won a cap since keeping a clean sheet in Australia's 2-0 win over Kuwait in August 2006. Before that, he had been a long-time squad member and had sat on the Australian bench 20 times.

The Bundaberg-born goalkeeper began his career 17 years ago with Brisbane Strikers in the NSL and played for Sydney Olympic and Parramatta Power, winning NSL titles with the Strikers and Olympic. He was named Hyundai A-League Goalkeeper of the Year in 2005/06 when he also helped Sydney FC to the inaugural Hyundai A-League championship.

BOLT FROM THE BLUE
Veteran Clint Bolton is an outside chance for a FIFA World Cup spot.

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THE GLORY
Adam Griffiths celebrates Newcastle Jets' Hyundai A-League 2008 Grand Final victory.

DOMESTIC Bliss?

Since its inception in 2005, the Hyundai A-League has showered fans with free-flowing football, entertaining games and high-profile players, the competition has expanded, and more teams are on the way. As the league nears the end of its fifth season, PHILIP MICALLEF finds out what's worked, what hasn't, and what the future holds for Australia's domestic competition.

It feels like only yesterday that Football Federation Australia chairman Frank Lowy was telling a gathering of hopeful football people how his little baby called the A-League was ideally placed to play a significant role in the national sporting landscape.

Lowy was speaking in August 2005 at the launch of the Hyundai A-League competition designed to take the game in Australia to a new level of professionalism and acceptance after the demise of the National Soccer League (NSL).

"I'm sure that if we provide good football matches, people will come and watch," Lowy said, with the assurance of a businessman who knows a thing or two about giving customers what they crave.

Nearly five years down the track, no one is disputing Lowy's rich sentiments that were expressed in a swell of goodwill and optimism.

But how far have we come since making those first tentative steps into the unknown? And is the game well placed to survive the next five years, and beyond?

THE WAY WE WERE

The answer to both those questions probably lies in the parlous state of Australian football before the Crawford Report in 2003. Football was seen by many as the *bête noire* of Australian sport.

This was a game riddled by mismanagement, conflicts of interest and alleged corruption that was reflected in a moribund NSL that was stuck with its 'ethnic' baggage and an underachieving Socceroos side that failed to qualify for the 2002 FIFA World Cup and could not even beat New Zealand for a place in the FIFA Confederations Cup.

Amid widespread relief and expectation, Lowy was invited to become the leader of the new game in 2003. His board announced it would make a complete overhaul of the organisation, even changing its name from the Australian Soccer Association to Football Federation Australia.

Then came the big task of changing the face of the game and its perception in mainstream Australia.

THE OVERHAUL

The new board had three main targets: establish a thriving national club competition, move from Oceania to Asia, and qualify for the 2006 FIFA World Cup

Australia joining the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on January 1, 2006, may well go down as the turning point of our game. All the national teams from the Qantas Socceroos right down to the women's under-16 team suddenly had meaningful matches against strong sides on a regular basis

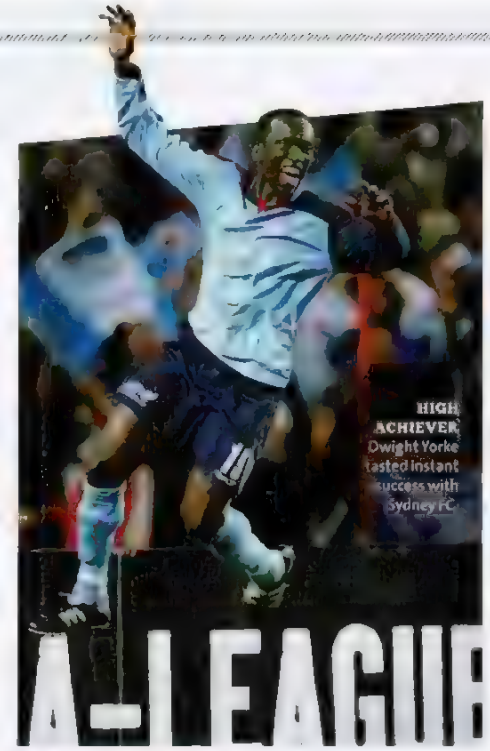
And the Qantas Socceroos, under the guidance of respected Dutchman Guus Hiddink, did the impossible by first beating Uruguay in that memorable play-off in Sydney in November 2005 before going on to distinguish themselves in Germany, ultimately falling 1-0 to eventual winner Italy in controversial circumstances.

Yet a vibrant national competition is the bread and butter of any sport, and when the eight-team Hyundai A-League was launched in 2005, Lowy was not the only person who realised that this would make or break the game in the long term.

He did not need to worry too much, however – the Hyundai A-League is still going strong after five years with a promise of better things to come.

The domestic competition has provided frustrated football fans with an avenue to channel their unbridled passion for the game. And the reward for their loyal support is a level competition played by attack minded teams in comfortable and safe stadiums.

SO NEAR... A disconsolate Travis Dodd after Adelaide's 2008 AFC Champions League Final loss.



HIGH ACHIEVER Dwight Yorke tasted instant success with Sydney FC.

A-LEAGUE

MAGIC MOMENTS

There have already been too many highlights to mention in the Hyundai A-League's short history. Some of them will be remembered for a long time.

Like captain Dwight Yorke's contribution to Sydney FC's inaugural Hyundai A-League championship win in 2006. Like Archie Thompson's five goals for Melbourne Victory in the Hyundai A-League 2007 Grand Final against Adelaide United at Docklands, played before a record crowd of 55,436

Like Newcastle Jets' fairytale run in the Hyundai A-League 2008 Finals Series or Adelaide United's fantastic charge to the 2008 AFC Champions League Final, or Englishman Robbie Fowler's impact this season for North Queensland Fury

That list will only grow

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

The salary cap that governs the competition seems to be working beautifully.

There is a healthy balance between the league's top and bottom clubs

So much so that any team can beat any other team on any day, which is great for the competition

The Hyundai A-League is still going strong after five years with a promise of better to come.

There have been few blowouts and one of them – perhaps the most extraordinary – involved Wellington Phoenix, which crushed high-flier Gold Coast United 6-0 in round 12. That says it all about the league's capacity to provide tales of the unexpected.

Perhaps the bigger, better and richer leagues in Europe would like to trade some of their worldwide appeal for the evenness and unpredictability that are a constant feature of our domestic competition.

THE CROWDS' CURVE

After a boom period that saw average crowds going past the 14,000 mark in 2007/08, attendances have averaged fewer than 10,000 this season

While the drop in crowd numbers is a concern, it is still worth noting that total attendances in the bigger 10-team league are higher than they have ever been

One explanation behind the slump could be the excellent performance of the Hyundai A-League's great ally: Fox Sports. The network has done a magnificent job in taking the game to Australia's lounge rooms and pubs. Every game, every week of the season. So good is the coverage that some claim it is keeping fans away from the gates.

Let's not forget, the league is still in its embryonic stages, and the key to its long-term success is survival in its formative years. Fox Sports has played a crucial role in supporting a professional 10-team competition that spans from Perth to Wellington

READY TO ROAR Fans show their support for Brisbane R...

And there can be no complaints about the quality on show. Compared to the NSL, going to a football match today is a much better and more enjoyable and rewarding experience. We marvel every week at the quality of goals scored by the likes of Shane Smeltz, Carlos Hernandez Alex Brosque and Thompson

Hyundai A-League patrons have been able to count on honest, fast and open contests since day one. Playing for a draw is almost unheard of.

This is a priceless asset that should never be underestimated.

State of Play

Melbourne Victory coach Ernie Merrick and Sydney FC's Steve Corica – who announced his retirement last month – have been part of the Hyundai A-League since day one and are in an ideal position to gauge its progress. They share their views on the game at home

WE ARE MELBOURNE
Melbourne Victory's fans are among the Hyundai A-League's most passionate.

DOOR'S OUT
Robbie Fowler has lost none of his goalscorer's instinct for the Fury.

Has the Hyundai A-League created a new image for the game?

MERRICK: "I do not know if image change was the aim in the first place. What I do know is that the standard of the past football, which used to be called soccer, was always very good. The ethnic factor was good for the grassroots of the game, but we needed a new competition that was geographically based with the capacity to attract good players from interstate and overseas."

CORICA: "I think the A-League has gained its acceptance in the community because the FFA have achieved their objective of shedding the game's 'ethnic' image by getting rid of the foreign team names, if you want to look at it that way. The league is now seen as a competition that appeals to everyone. All Australians can follow the league, not just Greeks or Italians."

What's your view of the general standard of play?

MERRICK: "It was good to start with and it is getting even better because of the standard and professionalism of the clubs. There are now top visa players in Australia and existing Socceroos such as Jason Culina, Mile Sterjovski and Chris Coyne. Many players who came over from Europe say they are surprised by our high standard."

CORICA: "I don't think we should have too much to worry about with the standard. Look at the league itself. We had three teams fighting for the premiership with three rounds to go, which made it exciting. The standard of play is very much like the first year, if not even better. We have some good foreigners like Robbie Fowler and North Queensland have done a fantastic job to get him over here. Then there are top Australians who have come back home. This has been the most high-profile league in terms of individuals, so really there is no need to panic."

Why have crowds been down this season?

MERRICK: "It would be unrealistic to assume that a fledgling competition would have the perfect incremental graph every year. That just does not happen. But there is more to crowds than just the quality of the football, such as the economy and other attractions and distractions throughout the length of a season. Actually, if you add the new teams and the extra games we have had this season, the crowds are up."

CORICA: "The dip in crowds is normal in a new competition – it's a normal curve. The J.League in Japan, for example, started well with huge attendances and had a fall in crowds after three or four years. But the attendances went up again after six or seven years. The A-League is following the same path as the J.League. After the World Cup in South Africa, our crowds will pick up again, so I would not be worrying too much about it. And if we can get the World Cup in Australia in 2018 or 2022, then that would be massive for the game here."

Is it good for the sport to have games screened live on television?

MERRICK: "Television has been good for us. Fox Sports have done a fantastic job promoting our game, showing not only live coverage, but high-standard highlights. Fox Sports have added to our capacity to make money and provided a platform for the game to grow. I'd love to see a free-to-air highlights package like the English Premier League."

CORICA: "It's difficult to say and, frankly, I don't know. Sometimes it is hard for families to come out to watch a game, so they stay home and watch it on television. For a player, you prefer the crowds to be at the games offering support. In Sydney, we'd love to have

It's almost time for the World Cup. And as every Socceroos supporter knows, the team that wins is the one whose fans shout the loudest. Target 2010!

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as many people as possible to our games and the Cove (the main supporter group for Sydney FC) have been giving us fantastic support from the beginning. But obviously Melbourne are leading the way with massive support virtually in every game."

What will the second Sydney and Melbourne teams bring to the competition?

MERRICK: "It is logical to assume that Australia's largest two cities would be able to cope with more than one team in each one, so I think it is a good move to expand the competition to 12.

The new boys will provide healthy competition and raise general standards. I am sure that a strong Melbourne Heart team will make Melbourne Victory stronger and more competitive. Not to mention we will have three passionate

> The standard of play is very much like the first year, if not even better. STEVE CORICA

derbies every season. We will be able to look forward to a Rangers v Celtic or Arsenal v Tottenham type of derby right here in Melbourne."

CORICA: "I won't be playing any more, but the new teams will create two big derbies in Sydney and Melbourne, which will provide a great atmosphere for the players lucky enough to be part of them. I think it will work and it will be fantastic.

SO IT BEGINS
John O'Neill (left) and Frank Lowy played a pivotal role in launching the Hyundai A-League

There is certainly room for two football teams in two such big cities."

Where to from here?

MERRICK: "Asia. The domestic league is improving, but the next step for Australia is the AFC Champions League. The UEFA Champions League saved a lot of countries in Europe and the big countries grew with it. The Asian event has a big future and offers us huge opportunities internationally."

CORICA: "The league is on the right track and, as I said before, crowds will pick up again, but we have to bring in the right marquee players from abroad. North Queensland have done well to sign Robbie Fowler – same as we did in the first year when we got Dwight Yorke."

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Countdown to QATAR

A group-by-group update from the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers on the road to Qatar 2011. BY JOHN MURRAY

GROUP A

While its World Cup dream fell by the wayside after a play-off loss to New Zealand, Bahrain marched on in AFC Asian Cup qualification, booking its place in the 2011 tournament with back to back 4-0 wins over Yemen and Hong Kong. The Bahrainis racked up four straight wins before losing 3-0 to Yemen in January, with qualification already in the bag. Ismaeel Abdullatif has been the inspiration up forward, netting five times, including a hat-trick in just nine first-half minutes against Hong Kong.

Second-placed Japan can boast two hat-trick heroes of its own – Shinji Okazaki bagged three goals in a 6-0 annihilation of Hong Kong in October, while Hirayama Sota followed in his countryman's footsteps by scoring all three goals in January's 3-2 defeat of Yemen. That result ensured the triple AFC Asian Cup champion would progress to Qatar. Abdullatif and Okazaki are the joint top scorers in qualification.

Yemen, on six points, and Hong Kong, with no points and a goal difference of minus 17, have only pride to play for when they meet at Hong Kong Stadium in the final fixture.

Results: Japan 2 Yemen 1, Hong Kong 1 Bahrain 3, Yemen 1 Hong Kong 0, Bahrain 1 Japan 0, Japan 6 Hong Kong 0, Hong Kong 0 Japan 4, Bahrain 4 Yemen 0, Yemen 2 Japan 3, Bahrain 4 Hong Kong 0, Yemen 3 Bahrain 0

Remaining fixtures: Japan v Bahrain, Hong Kong v Yemen (both March 3)

GROUP B

After a rocky start to its campaign, a point at home to Indonesia will be enough for Australia to participate in its second AFC Asian Cup finals, regardless of what happens in the other match between Oman and Kuwait. Stuck at the bottom of Group B after the first two games, the Qantas Socceroos – bolstered by the return of their European-based stars – turned their fortunes around with two hard-fought wins over the Omanis in the space of a month.

After beating Indonesia 2-1 in November, thanks to a brace from Bader Al-Mutwa, and then rescuing a point in the return fixture later that week, Kuwait held on to top spot in Group B after salvaging a 2-2 draw with Australia at home. It had trailed 2-0.

Now, the Kuwaitis need only a draw in Muscat to qualify, but they will face a tough task against an Omani outfit that stayed in contention with a 2-1 triumph over Indonesia in January. Fawzi Basheer and Ismael Suleiman were the visitors' heroes, scoring either side of a Boaz Solossa strike for Indonesia.

For the Omanis, there is a simple scenario: win and they're on the way to Qatar.

Results: Oman 0 Indonesia 0, Kuwait 0 Oman 1, Indonesia 0 Australia 0, Australia 0 Kuwait 1, Australia 1 Oman 0, Oman 1 Australia 2, Kuwait 2 Indonesia 1, Indonesia 1 Kuwait 1, Indonesia 1 Oman 2, Kuwait 2 Australia 2.

Remaining fixtures: Australia v Indonesia, Oman v Kuwait (both March 3).

GROUP C

With India guaranteed a bye to the AFC Asian Cup finals as the winner of the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup, and Malaysia without a point after completing its four games, all that remains to be decided in Group C is who will finish top: Uzbekistan or the United Arab Emirates.

The Uzbeks, with a perfect 100 per cent record from their three games so far, will be favourites to see off the UAE on home turf after winning the away fixture 1-0 last year. In January, a goal in the third minute of injury time from Ahmad Khalil sealed the UAE's passage to Qatar, and eliminated the Malaysians, in a 1-0 win.

Uzbekistan, which twice pushed Australia close in the 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, has rarely been troubled in this group. Two 3-1 wins over Malaysia in the space of five days in November were enough to ensure the Uzbekis' place in the AFC Asian Cup finals, and a draw in the group's final fixture will be sufficient to guarantee top spot.

Results: Malaysia 0 United Arab Emirates 5, United Arab Emirates 0 Uzbekistan 1, Uzbekistan 3 Malaysia 1, Malaysia 1 Uzbekistan 3, United Arab Emirates 1 Malaysia 0.

Remaining fixture: Uzbekistan v United Arab Emirates (March 3).

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

Group A

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
BAHRAIN	5	4	0	1	8	12
JAPAN	5	4	0	1	11	12
YEMEN	5	2	0	3	-2	6
HONG KONG	5	0	0	5	-17	0

Group B

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
KUWAIT	5	2	2	1	1	8
AUSTRALIA	5	1	3	1	1	6
OMAN	5	1	1	3	-2	4
INDONESIA	5	0	3	2	-2	3

Group C

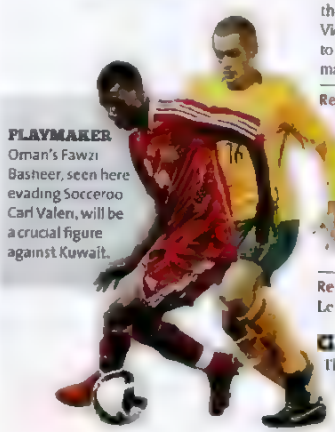
Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
UZBEKISTAN	3	3	0	0	5	9
UAE	3	1	0	2	-5	3
MALAYSIA	4	0	0	4	-10	0

Group D

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
CHINA	5	4	1	0	8	13
SYRIA	5	2	2	1	3	8
VIETNAM	5	1	2	2	1	5
LEBANON	5	0	1	4	-12	1

Group E

Team	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
IRAN	4	3	1	0	9	10
THAILAND	4	2	1	1	3	7
SINGAPORE	4	1	1	2	-3	4
JORDAN	5	1	2	2	-1	5



PLAYMAKER Oman's Fawzi Basheer, seen here evading Socceroo Carl Valeri, will be a crucial figure against Kuwait.

GROUP D

Just one match remains in Group D where Syria and China sewed up qualification with a scoreless draw in Hangzhou in January.

The Syrians, who will play bottom-of-the-table Lebanon in the last fixture, remain undefeated after following up three straight wins to start the campaign with a couple of draws.

A 94th-minute winner from Syrian striker Raja Rafe seriously dented Vietnam's hopes in November, before the two sides were locked in a goalless stalemate the next week.

After leaking three goals to Syria in their opening fixture, the Chinese defence was breached only twice more, as they crushed the Vietnamese 6-1 before home and away wins against Lebanon, a draw with Syria and another victory over Vietnam to sign off their qualification.

To their credit, the Lebanese – having lost the first four games of the campaign – got off the mark with a 1-1 draw against Vietnam in January. They'll hope to take that form into the final match away to Syria.

Results: Syria 3 China 2, Vietnam 3 Lebanon 1, China 6 Vietnam 1, Lebanon 0 Syria 2, Vietnam 0 Syria 1, Lebanon 0 China 2, Syria 0 Vietnam 0, China 1 Lebanon 0, China 0 Syria 0, Lebanon 1 Vietnam 1, Vietnam 1 China 2

Remaining fixture: Syria v Lebanon (March 3)

GROUP E

Three countries are fighting for one qualification spot in Group E. With group leader Iran already assured of qualification, Thailand, Singapore and Jordan are separated by just one point in the scrap for second.

The Iranians cannot be caught after downing Singapore in January, in a 3-1 win that was set up by two goals in as many minutes from Hadi Aghily and Mehrzad Madanchi.

Thailand, in second place thanks to a far superior goal difference to Singapore, will advance if it can beat Iran in Tehran. After a strong start, the Thais have stuttered in their past two fixtures, losing to Singapore, then being held by Jordan – both times on home soil. Should the Thais slip up again, Jordan or Singapore will be ready to pounce.

The Jordanians, who must win if they are to have any chance, have proved a tough team to break down, conceding just three goals in five games. Amer Deeb was the toast of Jordan when his 79th-minute goal earned a 1-0 win over Iran in November.

The Singaporeans, meanwhile, recovered from a disastrous 6-0 thumping by Iran in their opening match to notch two wins and remain in contention.

Results: Iran 6 Singapore 0, Jordan 0 Thailand 0, Singapore 2 Jordan 1, Thailand 0 Iran 0, Iran 1 Jordan 0, Singapore 1 Thailand 3, Thailand 0 Singapore 1, Jordan 1 Iran 0, Singapore 1 Iran 3, Thailand 0 Jordan 0.

Remaining fixtures: Iran v Thailand, Jordan v Singapore (both March 3).

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Qantas Socceroos v Indonesia

JUDGMENT DAY

Australia must get a result against Indonesia tonight if it is to guarantee its place in the 2011 AFC Asian Cup

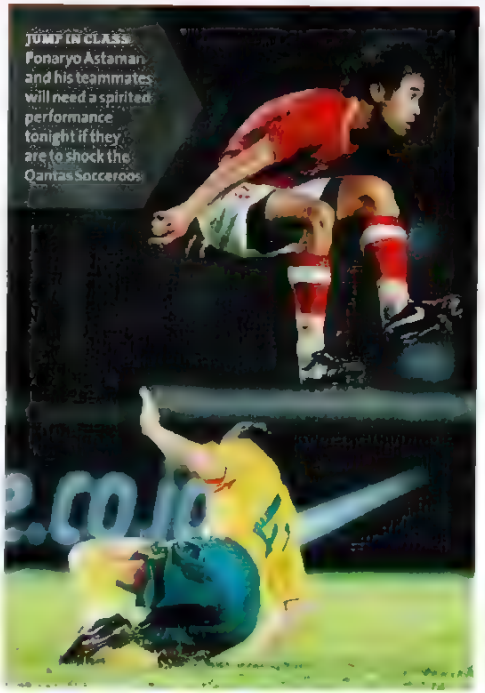
For a country that is fanatical about football, things haven't gone exactly to plan for Indonesia in recent times. After an 11-1 thrashing at the hands of Syria over two legs scuppered hopes of reaching the preliminary stages of FIFA World Cup qualification, the Indonesians slumped even further after failing to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup for the first time since 1992.

The lowest point came in January's 2-1 loss to Oman when a disgruntled fan took matters into his own hands. So unhappy was Hendri Mulyadi that he invaded the pitch, dribbled the ball down the wing and tried to score. Sadly, the supporter could do no better than the players he was berating, his shot being kept out by Omani goalkeeper Ali Al-Habsi.

Scoring goals in this campaign has been a major problem for the Indonesians, who have found the net just three times in five qualification games - and that includes drawing a blank against Australia last year.

Yet despite this lack of firepower and a disappointing run of results, the Indonesians have proved a hard team to beat. As Australia found out at a packed Gelora Bung Karno Stadium on a steamy Jakarta night last January. Led by veteran coach Benny Dolo, the nation enjoyed its finest result in years when it held the Qantas Socceroos to a surprise 0-0 stalemate.

Fielding a team made up of Hyundai A-League players – nine of whom were Australian debutants – Pim Verbeek's men, and Adelaide goalkeeper Eugene Galekovic in particular, endured a few early moments of concern against the home side before gradually taking charge of the game, without managing to break the deadlock.



JUMP IN CLASS Ponaryo Astaman and his teammates will need a spirited performance tonight if they are to shock the Qantas Socceroos

Scoring goals in this campaign has been a major problem for the Indonesians.

That result, which followed another goalless draw in Oman the previous week, put the Indonesians in a solid position in Group B after two games. However, a last-gasp loss to Kuwait in November, and then a draw with the same opponent four days later, made a serious dent in their qualification ambitions, before the defeat to Oman – despite the efforts of that one irate fan – sealed their fate.

While Indonesia has nothing to play for in Brisbane tonight other than national pride and the opportunity to make a few headlines, don't expect Australia to take its opponent lightly. In a group they were widely expected to dominate, the Qantas Socceroos are yet to book their place in Qatar next year as they enter the final round of games.

For the Australians, the equation is simple: a win or draw against Indonesia will ensure they finish in the top two of Group B. Qualification is still possible if they lose, but the Qantas Socceroos will have to count on Kuwait doing them a favour against Oman.

History would suggest the Australians should finish the job themselves. Since Australia beat Indonesia 2-0 in the teams' first encounter in Jakarta in 1967, the countries have clashed 14 further times, with the Qantas Socceroos boasting 11 wins in total, and the Indonesians just one. Before last year's surprising draw, Australia had come out on top in the previous five matches, the most recent being a 3-0 triumph in a 2005 friendly organised to raise money for the Boxing Day tsunami fund. Ante Milicic scored twice in Perth, while David Zdrilic bagged the other.

Australia's biggest win over Indonesia was 6-0 in a 1974 FIFA World Cup qualifier, with Atti Abonyi and Jim Mackay grabbing a brace. That win ensured the Australians'

STALEMATE
Tom Pondeljak skips past Budi Sudarsono in last year's draw.

progress to the second round of qualifying, before going on to book its place at the FIFA World Cup finals in Germany for the first time.

Although Indonesia has got the better of Australia on just one occasion, it was a match older Socceroo fans won't care to remember. It was 1981, and Australia was once again struggling to qualify for the FIFA World Cup. A goal from Risidanto with two minutes remaining in Surabaya gave Indonesia a 1-0 win, and eliminated the Qantas Socceroos. Even worse, arch rival New Zealand would go on to qualify for the biggest sporting tournament on the planet in Spain.

In truth, success on the football field has been sparse for Indonesia, a country with a population 10 times that of Australia, although it enjoyed a notable first back in 1938. Eight years after the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI) was founded in 1930, Indonesia became the first Asian team to take part in the FIFA World Cup, as the Dutch East Indies. The fairytale didn't last long, however – a 6-0 loss to eventual finalist Hungary in the first round guaranteed a hasty exit.

Indonesia has not returned to the world's biggest stage since. Its cause has not been helped by what has, at times, been an unstable political situation at home. After the Japanese invaded the country in World War II, the PSSI became inactive. Joining FIFA in 1952 marked Indonesia's return to the international fold and, two years later, it became a member of the Asian Football Confederation.

Australia's biggest win over Indonesia was 6-0 in a 1974 FIFA World Cup qualifier.

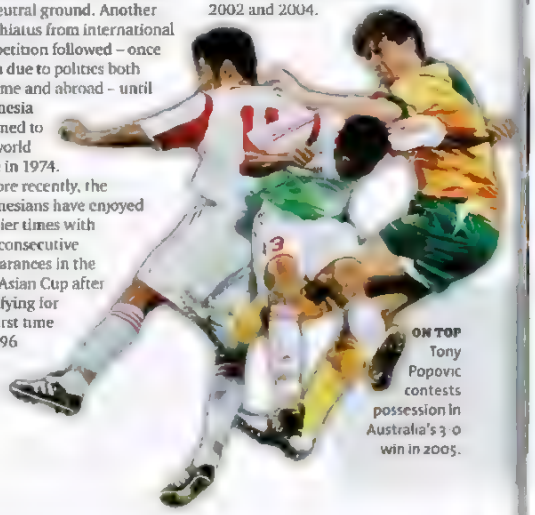
Under the shrewd managerial guidance of Antun Pogacnik, the country went on to enjoy one of its most successful eras. Pogacnik, who played for Yugoslavia and Croatia, and is still a revered figure in Indonesia, was in charge of the national side for 10 years until his death in 1963. Most notably, he led the country to the quarter-finals at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, where it held the hotly favoured Soviet Union to a 0-0 draw. The Soviets, who were skippered by goalkeeping great Lev Yashin, won the replay 4-0 on their way to winning the gold medal.

In 1958, the Indonesians saw off China in the opening qualifier for the FIFA World Cup, but withdrew from the next stage after FIFA refused to schedule a tie against Israel on neutral ground. Another long hiatus from international competition followed – once again due to politics both at home and abroad – until Indonesia returned to the world stage in 1974.

More recently, the Indonesians have enjoyed happier times with four consecutive appearances in the AFC Asian Cup after qualifying for the first time in 1996.

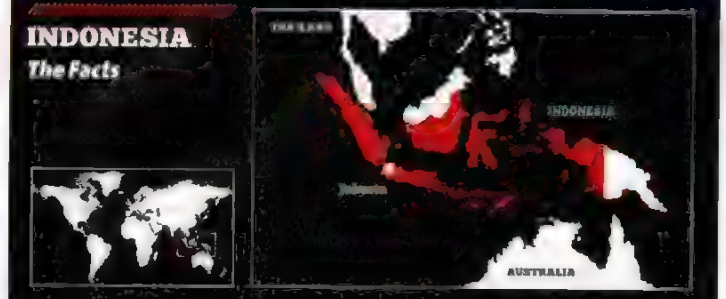
In 2007, they co-hosted the tournament with Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, and caused a stir when they beat Bahrain 2-1 in their opening fixture. However, narrow losses to powerhouses Saudi Arabia and the Korea Republic meant they just missed out on reaching the knockout stages.

There have also been a series of near misses in the Tiger Cup, the south-east Asian football championship in which Indonesia finished runner-up in 2000, 2002 and 2004.



ON TOP
Tony Popovic contests possession in Australia's 3-0 win in 2005.

INDONESIA
The Facts



- Indonesia is a country made up of thousands of islands, situated in south-east Asia.
- The Indonesian people speak more than 300 local languages.
- Indonesia was the first Asian country to play in the FIFA World Cup, competing in the 1938 tournament as the Dutch East Indies.
- It has an estimated population of 230 million, with the world's highest muslim population.
- Indonesia has played Australia 15 times, for one win, three draws and 11 losses.
- Indonesia's highest FIFA world ranking was 76 in September 1998.
- Occupied by the Dutch for several centuries, Indonesia declared its independence in 1945.
- Indonesia's sole victory over Australia was a 1-0 win in a 1982 FIFA World Cup qualifier in Surabaya.
- Its lowest ranking was 153, a position it has occupied three times (in 1995, 2006 and 2008).
- An estimated crowd of 50,000 watched Indonesia's 0-0 draw against Australia at Jakarta's Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in January last year.
- Goalkeeper Markus Harison Rihihina became the first Indonesian to be nominated for the AFC Asian Footballer of the Year award in October last year.
- Argentinian FIFA World Cup winner Mario Kempes and former Cameroon striker Roger Milla both played in the Indonesian league.

Eugene Galekovic watches the ball run wide of the goal in the 2009 clash.

Peter Withe – best known for scoring the only goal for Aston Villa in the 1982 European Cup final against Bayern Munich – was in charge for the 2004 tournament, leading Indonesia to the final in his first year at the helm. Withe, who enjoyed success with the Thailand national team before taking the role, left his post in 2007 after failing to reach the final of that year's Tiger Cup.

Long-term job security is not something you'd naturally associate with the Indonesian manager's role. To his credit, Withe lasted longer than most of his predecessors. Since 1970, only one other man – Russian Anatoli Polosin – has remained in the job for four years, from 1987-91. Current boss Dolo, who took over at the start of 2008 after enjoying significant success in the domestic league, is in his second spell as national coach, having previously led the team from 2000-01.

After a disappointing qualifying campaign, the coach will be desperate to sign off with a positive result in Brisbane. Even though the Qantas Socceroos will not be at full strength, with only a few foreign-based players returning home for this match, Dolo will be under no illusions of the enormity of the task facing his team which is ranked 136th in the world, sandwiched between Bermuda and Hong Kong, against a country rated No. 23 that is rubbing shoulders with Ivory Coast and Ukraine.

If the Indonesians are to spring a surprise tonight, they will not only need a defensive display to match that night in Jakarta last year, but also inspiration at the other end from their strikers – Bambang Pamungkas, the country's record goalscorer, and Budi Sudarsono, nicknamed Budi Drogba for his resemblance to the Chelsea hitman.

While Australia can boast a miserly defence under Verbeek, both strikers will have taken heart from the uncertain display at the back in the Qantas Socceroos' last outing against Kuwait, where they let a 2-0 lead slip, holding on for a 2-2 draw.

Goals have proved hard to come by for most visitors to Suncorp Stadium, however, where the Qantas Socceroos have proved unbeatable in recent years. In its past two appearances at the venue in 2008, Australia edged out Iraq 1-0 in the first round of FIFA World Cup qualifying, before comfortably accounting for Qatar 4-0 in the second stage. The last visiting nation to breach the home defence in Brisbane was Paraguay in the farewell international for Australian quartet Tony Popovic, Tony Vidmar, Stan Lazaridis and Zeljko Kalac, in October 2006. And that only came via an unfortunate Michael Beauchamp own goal deep into injury time.

Rest assured, the Indonesians will gratefully accept any similar gifts Lady Luck may throw their way if they are to cause an upset tonight. ●

Good luck Qantas Socceroos against Indonesia tonight.

QANTAS SOCCEROOS

AUSTRALIA

GOALKEEPERS

- 95 Clint Bolton
- 82 Eugene Galekovic
- 88 Danny Vukovic

DEFENDERS

- 60 Shannon Cole
- 61 Simon Colosimo
- 103 Luke DeVere
- 68 Andrew Durante
- 66 Scott Jamieson
- 126 Michael Marrone
- 79 Jonathan McKain
- 42 Mark Milligan
- 29 Jade North
- 8 Luke Wilkshire

MIDFIELDERS

- 24 Jacob Burns
- 5 Jason Culina
- 110 Ben Kantarovski
- 119 Mathew Leckie
- 41 Matt McKay
- 43 Stuart Musialik
- 121 Tommy Oar
- 21 Mile Sterjovski
- 86 Matt Thompson
- 90 Michael Zullo

STRIKERS

- 56 Alex Brosque
- 9 Josh Kennedy
- 127 Daniel McBreen
- 89 David Williams

ASSISTANTS

INDONESIA

Write the Indonesian numbers in the spaces provided below when tonight's team is announced

GOALKEEPERS

- Markus Harison Rihihina
- Charis Yulianto
- Talaohu Abdulmushafry
- Ponaryo Astaman
- Feri Rotin Sulu
- Budi Sudarsono Syaifulloh
- Ismed Sofyan
- Firman Utina
- Syamsul Bachri
- Hariono
- Arif Suyono
- Bambang Pamungkas
- Muhammad Ridwan
- Eka Ramdani
- Isnan Ali
- Richardo Salampessy
- Nova Arianto
- Maman Abdurahman
- Saktiawan Sinaga
- Marthen Christian Worabai

ASSISTANTS

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Qantas. Official airline of Australian football.

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QANTAS SOCCEROOS

AUSTRALIA
GAME ON
SOLO
OFFICIAL PARTNER FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

MEET THE QANTAS SOCCEROOS

There will be a strong Hyundai A-League presence on the field tonight for Australia. Pim Verbeek's squad, profiled on the following pages, is made up of three goalkeepers, 10 defenders, 10 midfielders and four strikers. BY CALLUM TWOMEY

UNITED FORCE A draw will be enough for the Qantas Socceroos to qualify tonight

Two things strike you about Pim Verbeek's squad of 27 for tonight's AFC Asian Cup qualifying match: one, it's all about the Hyundai A-League, and two, age is no barrier

Verbeek has shown faith in the domestic competition by selecting a squad consisting largely of Hyundai A-League players, with three of the four overseas-based footballers coming from Asia.

While Josh Kennedy and Mark Milligan have made their way to Brisbane from Japan, and Jade North and Luke Wilkshire are returning home from Korea and Russia respectively, Verbeek will be using tonight's game to scour the talent from those playing on Australian turf.

Already, the coach has illustrated that form is paramount. From Sydney FC, the 2009/10 premier's plate winner, five players have been selected in the squad Sky Blues Clint Bolton, Alex Brosque, Shannon Cole, Simon Colosimo and Stuart Musialik are looking to don the green and gold, while Adelaide United and local side Brisbane Roar provide four representatives.

Verbeek also seems to have ignored age when it comes to selecting his squad, with no less than seven players aged 21 or under. At only 18, Newcastle midfielder Ben Kantarovski and Brisbane Roar livewire Tommy Oar are the youngest to be chosen, while 32-year-old striker Daniel McBreen may get his first opportunity in national colours. Veteran goalkeeper Bolton, 34, is also a chance for his first taste of international football since 2006

With only three months left until the FIFA World Cup, tonight provides another chance for these players to press their claims to be on the plane to South Africa

GOALKEEPER

Clint Bolton

AGE 34

CLUB SYDNEY FC (AUS)

CAPS 1

Aiming to make his first appearance in the green and gold since 2006, Bolton was the surprise inclusion in Pim Verbeek's squad. The Sydney veteran has had an excellent season, helping the Sky Blues claim their first premier's plate, but recently confirmed he is set to join Melbourne Heart next season.
He made his Qantas Socceroos debut a decade ago and will look to add to his four caps.

GOALKEEPER

Eugene Galekovic

AGE 28

CLUB ADELAIDE UNITED (AUS)

CAPS 3

Galekovic has gone from strength to strength since switching from Melbourne Victory to Adelaide United in 2007, holding down the first-choice position and being named club champion for the 2008/09 season. He impressed in the AFC Champions League, and carried this form at international level when he made his debut last year against Indonesia and kept a clean sheet

GOALKEEPER

Danny Vukovic

AGE 24

CLUB CENTRAL COAST MARINERS (AUS)

CAPS 0

A Qantas Young Socceroo and under-23 graduate, Vukovic has honed his skills with Central Coast Mariners since 2005. Considered a likely replacement for Mark Schwarzer when the veteran hangs up the gloves, he was part of the squad for the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals campaign as a stand-in keeper. An emerging talent, Vukovic will be keen to get his first international cap.

DEFENDER

Shannon Cole

AGE 24

CLUB SYDNEY FC (AUS)

CAPS 0

Only 12 months before being called up to the national squad in 2009, Cole had been playing in the state league, marking a meteoric rise in fortunes for the defender. His flexibility makes him a player who adds great depth to the Australian squad – he's capable of playing both as a full-back and a midfielder. Now in his second season with Sydney FC, he is renowned for his skill as a free-kick specialist.

DEFENDER

Simon Colosimo

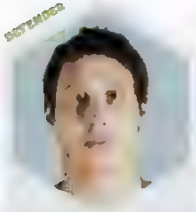
AGE 31

CLUB SYDNEY FC (AUS)

CAPS 25

Colosimo joined Sydney FC in 2008 and has established himself as a regular part of the starting side. The central defender has had an intermittent international career since first appearing in Australian colours in a friendly against Manchester United in 1999, but has found himself back on the scene recently. Colosimo was a starting member of the side that drew 2-2 with Kuwait in January.

DEFENDER



Mark Milligan

AGE 24

CLUB JEF UNITED (JAP)

CAPS 8

Milligan plies his trade with Japanese side JEF United after leaving Chinese club Shanghai Shenua in January.
His hard-nosed and competitive approach is what defines his game. Milligan, who was part of the 2006 FIFA World Cup squad, is starting to develop into a regular squad member, and his tough and resilient style as a defender should soon see him cement a permanent position.

DEFENDER

Jade North

AGE 28

CLUB INCHEON UNITED (KOR)

CAPS 28

North made his international debut against Vanuatu in 2002 and now has 28 caps for the Qantas Socceroos.
An attacking full-back, he played for the Qantas Olyroos at both the Athens and Beijing Olympics, becoming the first Aboriginal to captain his country in 2008. North was a key player for Newcastle Jets in the Hyundai A-League before joining Korean side Incheon United in 2009.

DEFENDER

Luke Wilkshire

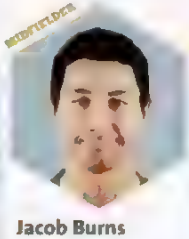
AGE 28

CLUB DYNAMO MOSCOW (RUS)

CAPS 39

Wilkshire was a surprise inclusion in Guus Hiddink's FIFA Word Cup squad of 2006, and his stature as a player has grown in leaps and bounds since. After two seasons with Dutch club FC Twente, he transferred to Dynamo Moscow in 2008. His tenacity and attacking nature has made him a Qantas Socceroo regular – he has scored in Australia's past two outings.

MIDFIELDER



Jacob Burns

AGE 31

CLUB PERTH GLORY (AUS)

CAPS 10

Burns replaced Jason Culina in the starting line-up to face Uzbekistan in a FIFA World Cup qualifier in 2008, and has played intermittently since. After early success with Leeds United in England, he had stints in Poland and Romania before heading home for the 2009/10 Hyundai A-League season, signing a three-year deal with Perth Glory and leading the team into the finals this season

Jason Culina

AGE 29

CLUB GOLD COAST UNITED (AUS)

CAPS 44

With 44 caps to his name, Culina is one of the most experienced players in tonight's side, and has been an important member of the squad for several years. A midfielder always looking to push forward, he started all four games in the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Culina returned home in 2009 to be Gold Coast's marquee player for its inaugural season, leading the club to the finals.

DEFENDER

Luke DeVere

AGE 20

CLUB BRISBANE ROAR (AUS)

CAPS 0

After a bright season for the Roar, DeVere is a good chance to make his international debut tonight. Although only 20, the defender has shown an ability to use his strength, height and pace to advantage, and benefited from the guidance of Craig Moore alongside him at Brisbane before he moved on. Devere captained the Qantas Young Socceroos, underlining his strong leadership qualities.

DEFENDER

Andrew Durante

AGE 27

CLUB WELLINGTON PHOENIX (NZ)

CAPS 0

Despite previously being part of Pim Verbeek's FIFA World Cup training squad, Durante is yet to make his international debut. The defender, who captains Wellington Phoenix, has been a pivotal player in his side's surge into the finals this season. Durante transferred from Newcastle Jets in 2008, having been named man of the match in its Grand Final win over Central Coast earlier that year.

DEFENDER

Scott Jamieson

AGE 21

CLUB ADELAIDE UNITED (AUS)

CAPS 1

After a series of strong performances for Adelaide United, Jamieson made his international debut in 2009 against Indonesia. Still only 21, he has valuable experience after three years learning his trade with English Premiership outfit Bolton Wanderers, and has become a permanent fixture at Adelaide since returning to Australia in 2008. A player to look out for in the future.

DEFENDER

Michael Marrone

AGE 22

CLUB ADELAIDE UNITED (AUS)

CAPS 0

He may be short and lightly built, but Marrone has established himself as an assertive defender at Adelaide United, starting most games this season. Despite his impressive season, Marrone will move to Townsville and join North Queensland Fury next season. He has represented the Qantas Young Socceroos and is uncapped for the senior side. Another who has a bright future.

DEFENDER

Jonathan McKain

AGE 27

CLUB WELLINGTON PHOENIX (NZ)

CAPS 12

In contention for international selection for the first time since 2006, McKain has been rewarded for his consistent form for Wellington Phoenix.
The defender returned to Oceania in 2008 after a stint in Romania, and brings experience to the squad, having represented Australia in the 2004 Olympics and 2005 FIFA Confederations Cup.

MIDFIELDER

Ben Kantarovski

AGE 18

CLUB NEWCASTLE JETS (AUS)

CAPS 0

Kantarovski's second call-up to the Qantas Socceroos squad speaks volumes of his ability and the faith coach Pim Verbeek has in the 18-year-old. The midfielder, who can also play in defence, was the youngest player to be signed in the Hyundai A-League when the Jets picked him up as a 15-year old. Strong and composed with a good grasp of the game, Kantarovski looks set to be a star.

MIDFIELDER

Mathew Leckie

AGE 19

CLUB ADELAIDE UNITED (AUS)

CAPS 0

New to the international scene, Leckie is another youngster to be given the opportunity to represent his country by Pim Verbeek and his assistants. A right winger who can also play as a striker, Leckie has already shown his talents at Adelaide United where he made his debut in September last year.
He has a strong pedigree, having international experience at junior level.

MIDFIELDER

Matt McKay

AGE 27

CLUB BRISBANE ROAR (AUS)

CAPS 3

Queensland-born McKay has been a key figure for Brisbane Roar over the past few seasons, where he is club captain. Fit and athletic, McKay uses his speed and endurance to get into good attacking positions from midfield. A left-sided player, he will be keen to get more opportunities leading up to the FIFA World Cup and build on his international experience. Should get plenty of local support tonight.

MIDFIELDER

Stuart Musialik

AGE 24

CLUB SYDNEY FC (AUS)

CAPS 0

Musialik was one of the Qantas Olyroos' best players in the 2008 Beijing campaign and has made quite an impression in the past two seasons in the Hyundai A-League. The move to Sydney FC came after premiership success with Newcastle Jets in 2007/08. A quality midfielder, he gave further evidence of his goalscoring ability when he fired in a 25-metre winner against Newcastle in January.

MIDFIELDER

Tommy Oar

CLUB BRISBANE ROAR (AUS)

CAPS 0

Oar is beginning to show why former national coach Frank Farina hand-picked him from the Queensland Academy of Sport. First called up to the Australian squad for the AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Kuwait in January, the teenage winger has exquisite dribbling skills, and became the youngest player to score in the Hyundai A-League last season. Would enjoy a large crowd tonight.

Mile Sterjovski

AGE 30

CLUB PERTH GLORY (AUS)

CAPS 92

A midfielder who is capable of pushing forward and scoring goals – as shown by his hat trick against Tahiti in 2004 Sterjovski is an important and versatile member of the Australian set-up. He can be used as a wide midfielder or as a striker. The experienced Sterjovski has 42 international caps, with his most recent appearance coming in the 2-2 draw against Kuwait in January

Matt Thompson

AGE 22

CLUB NEWCASTLE JETS (AUS)

CAPS 3

Thompson is in his last season as a Newcastle Jets player, having confirmed he will join new franchise Melbourne Heart next season. The midfielder, who made his international debut against Indonesia last year, adds depth to Pim Verbeek's squad. He also has strong leadership skills and experience – he is the Jets' skipper and the most capped player in the Hyundai A-League

Michael Zullo

AGE 21

CLUB BRISBANE ROAR (AUS)

CAPS 2

Zullo is another of the young brigade at the Brisbane Roar coming through the ranks and has shown enough to suggest he may be the pick of the bunch. He made his Hyundai A-League debut in the 2007/08 season and has since become a fans' favourite, with his speed, agility and fancy footwork hard to defend. Zullo received his first international cap last year in the 0-0 draw against Indonesia in Jakarta

STRIKER

Alex Brosque

AGE 26

CLUB SYDNEY FC (AUS)

CAPS 4

Born in Sydney, Brosque has confirmed his reputation as one of the most exciting forwards in the competition with a stellar season for his hometown club. He won his first international cap in 2004, but has made only three further appearances in a Qantas Socceroos jersey. After a long hiatus, Brosque returned to the national squad in 2009 as a replacement for the injured Josh Kennedy.

STRIKER

Josh Kennedy

AGE 27

CLUB NAGOYA GRAMPUS (JAP)

CAPS 30

Kennedy rose to prominence at the 2006 FIFA World Cup and has since been a strong addition to the squad. The giant striker is difficult to stop in the air and showed this throughout Australia's FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign, scoring a crucial goal against Uzbekistan that sealed his team's progression. One of the few overseas-based players in the squad

STRIKER

Daniel McBreen

AGE 32

CLUB PERTH GLORY (AUS)

CAPS 9

Born in England, McBreen's move to Perth appears to have paid off with the striker a chance to make his international debut at 32. After spending the best part of a decade in the UK, McBreen had a stint with North Queensland in 2009. He then signed a short-term deal in January with the Glory where he scored five goals in six games leading into the finals.

STRIKER

David Williams

AGE 21

CLUB NORTH QUEENSLAND FURY (ASL)

CAPS 1

There are high hopes for Brisbane born Williams, who is one of the nation's most exciting youngsters. A talented striker Williams has played just one match for Australia – a FIFA World Cup qualifier against China in Sydney but looks set to boost that total in years to come. He spent the 2009/10 season with North Queensland Fury in the Hyundai A-League on a year's loan from Danish side Brondby.

COACH

Pim Verbeek

AGE 53

POSITION HEAD COACH

Verbeek took over the top job in Australian football when he replaced Graham Arnold in 2007 and has proved to be an ideal choice, leading the Qantas Socceroos to the 2010 FIFA World Cup with a minimum of fuss. The results-driven Dutchman has many years of coaching experience at club level in his native Netherlands, Europe and Asia. Verbeek took the Korea Republic to third place in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals.

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA STAFF

Phillip Wolanski	Head of Delegation
Pim Verbeek	Head Coach
Gary Moretti	Team Manager
Graham Arnold	Assistant Coach
Henk Duut	Assistant Coach
Tony Franken	Goalkeeping Coach
Ron Smith	Technical Adv.
Darren Burgess	Conditioner
Dr Peter Brukner	Doctor
Les Gells	Physiotherapist
Kurt Lisle	Physiotherapist
Luke Attwell	Masseur
Dom Rabach	Equipment Manager
Rod Allen	Head of Media Relations
Adam Mark	Media Manager
Joel Freeme	Assistant Team Manager
Lindsay McNeill	TV Unit
Mark Sellke	Security
Miguel Angel Escalante Bello	Chef

Ones to Watch

Meet five Indonesian players who could pose Australia [illegible] of problems tonight.

ON THE RUN
Expect Indonesia to play a fast, running game, and move the ball quickly

BAMBANG PAMUNGKAS

With his own website, his own foundation and a tremendous knack for scoring goals, Pamungkas is the biggest name in Indonesian football. Unlike most of his teammates, the 29-year-old centre forward has not spent his whole career in his home nation, but has played in the Netherlands and reportedly had trials with several German teams, including Borussia Moenchengladbach. However, it was in the Malaysian Premier League in 2005 where he made his biggest impression, bagging 24 league goals in as many games to lift Selangor FC to the title, as well as two cups. Pamungkas, who scored on debut against Lithuania in 1999, is his country's record goalscorer and scored in the loss to Kuwait in November. Left on the bench last time the teams played, he will be raring to go should he get an opportunity tonight

MARKUS HARISON RIHIHINA

Rihihina made his name on the international scene when he was brought into the team for the final group match in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup against the Korea Republic. The goalkeeper pulled off a string of saves to restrict the opposition to one goal in a narrow loss. When the Qantas Socceroos came to Indonesia in January last year, Rihihina produced further heroics and proved impassable in the goalless draw. While the Indonesian attack has stuttered in qualifying, their defence has leaked just five goals in as many games, and much of that has been down to the keeper. In recognition of his form, Rihihina was the first Indonesian to be nominated for the AFC Asian Player of the Year award last year

BUDI SUDARSONO

Meet the Indonesian Didier Drogba. Such is Sudarsono's resemblance to Chelsea's Ivorian striker in the eyes of some fans that he is nicknamed Budi Drogba. Given that the 30-year-old striker is only 174cm, one can assume the comparison stems from his looks and goalscoring ability, rather than his build. Sudarsono will always hold a special place in Indonesian history after scoring against Qatar in the 2004 AFC Asian Cup – the nation's first win in the tournament. He also found the net against Bahrain in the 2007 tournament and, a year later, showed further proof of his potency with a hat-trick against Cambodia. Sydney FC fans are unlikely to have fond memories of Sudarsono: he scored the winner for Persik Kediri in the teams' 2007 AFC Champions League clash.

CHARIS YULIANTO

Yulianto took over as national captain in 2008. A central defender and pivotal figure in the backline that has kept two clean sheets in qualifying, he made his domestic debut for Arema Malang back in 1997 as a teenager, seven years before his international bow against Saudi Arabia. Yulianto has played for several clubs, including Selangor FC in Malaysia, but found instant success with current team Sriwijaya Fc in 2007, winning both the league title and Copa Indonesia. Will not give the Australian frontline any favours tonight.

PONARYO ASTAMAN

A lynchpin of the Indonesian midfield, Astaman captained the national side in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals before handing over the reins to Charis Yulianto the next year. If the Qantas Socceroos give him too much time and space tonight, they could be made to pay, as Astaman has a tremendous passing game. The speedy midfielder has been on the international scene since 2003 and featured in the last two clashes between the countries – the goalless draw last year and the 3-0 win for Australia in Perth in 2005. Astaman boasts AFC Champions League experience with both PSM Makassar and Arema Malang and will not be overawed by the occasion tonight

HEADS YOU WIN
Bambang Pamungkas challenges Rody Vargas for the ball

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Optus, the Official Telecommunications Partner of Football Federation Australia is proud to be supporting the Qantas Socceroos on their journey to South Africa. Visit optus.com.au/football to find out more.

AUSTRALIA

'yes' OPTUS

The Real McKay

Q&A

LOOKING SHARP
One of the Hyundai A-League's most consistent players, Matt McKay is aiming to impress at the top level.

Matt McKay is sure to get plenty of support from the locals tonight. Born and bred in Brisbane, the Roar captain has played every Hyundai A-League season for the Queensland club and is now in the mix for Qantas Socceroos selection. He spoke to ASHLEY BROWNE.

How would you describe your season with Brisbane Roar?
It was difficult. Obviously we didn't have the results we wanted. But we've got a developing young team and even if the results didn't work out this season, we're building up to be a stronger team in the years to come.

There was a change of coach at Brisbane this year. What has Ange Postecoglou been like as a coach and has he changed much about your game?
He hasn't changed my game too much. I'm still trying to get forward and help the strikers as much as I can. I'm still trying to add bits to my game when I can, so it hasn't changed all that much since he's been in.

You're a Brisbane boy, so the opportunity to play for the Qantas Socceroos at Suncorp Stadium must be pretty special. What will it mean to you?
Yeah, it's obviously been fixtured for quite a long time, so it's something I've hoped I could be part of. Suncorp is a great stadium, so to be playing there for your country is a real honour and especially in front of family friends.

What's the largest crowd you've played in front of there?
It was about 36,000 for a minor semi-final against Sydney (2008). There's a good atmosphere there even when we play in front of 10,000 or 15,000 people, and when it gets to 30,000 it really steps up again. If we can manage to sell it out, it will be fantastic because it is just an amazing place to play at.

I imagine that it's a place where you've been watching sport your whole life, even back in the old Lang Park days. I supported the Brisbane Strikers back in the old NSL days and the season they won the title – 1996-97 – I was a season ticket holder and it was a great old stadium. I've been there as a spectator and a player nearly my whole life. It's a great venue

So have you had been badgered by friends and family for tickets for the Indonesia game?
Not yet (laughs). I haven't got a large family so I guess they don't think it's a problem and are going to leave it until closer to the game.

LOCAL BOY McKay is the games record holder for the Roar

It's a really good set-up with good coaches and good medical people.

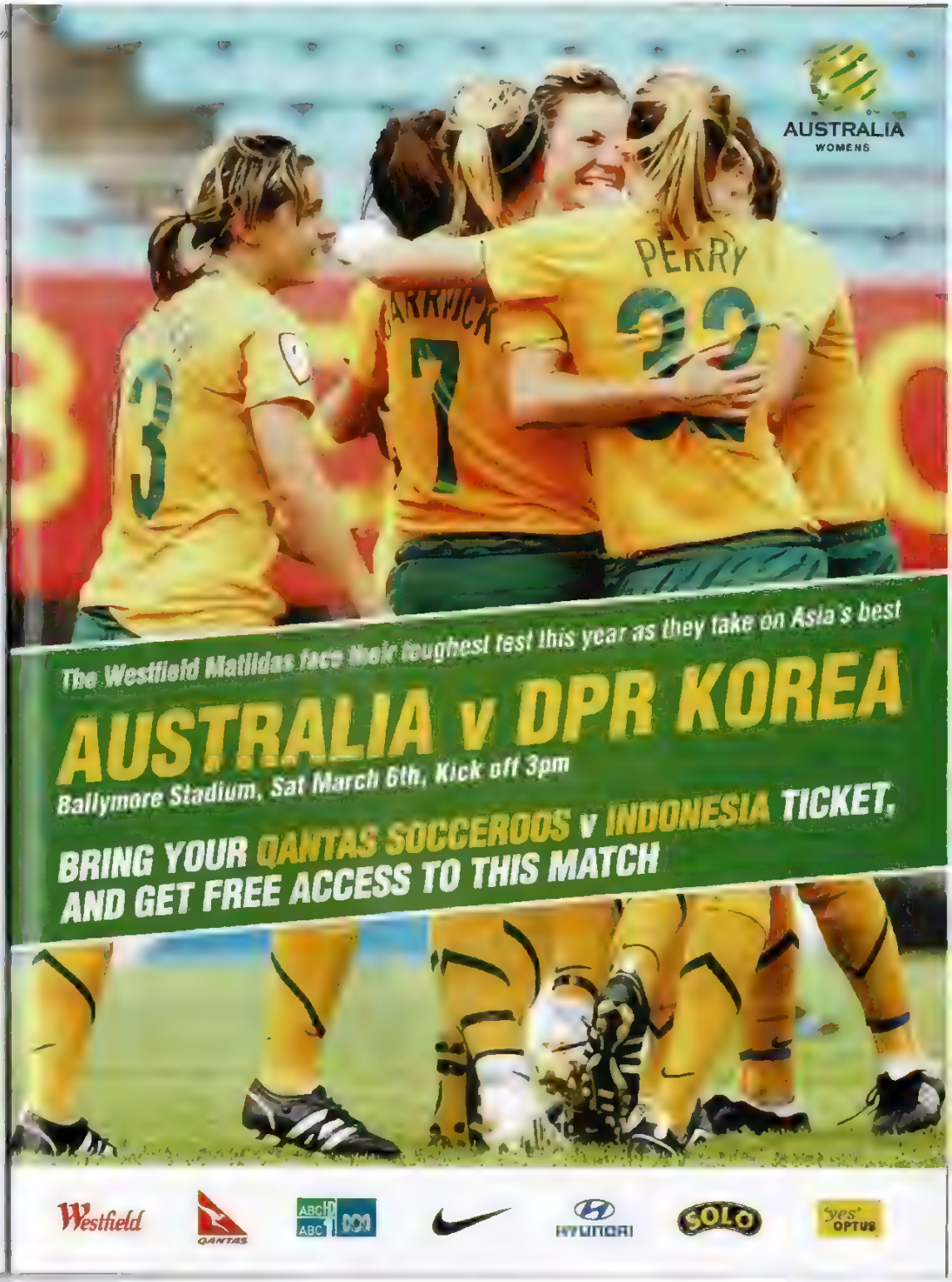
You've played three times for the Qantas Socceroos and one of those was against the Indonesians. What can you tell us about the opposition?
They're not the biggest players and they're not very physical, but they're fast and they're extremely sharp with the ball. You've got to be careful. Their movement is quite good and we'll need to be wary of them and concentrate on their set pieces. But having said that, I think that, technically, we should be better than them

How much do you enjoy being part of the Qantas Socceroos squad?
It's great. It's like being part of a different club and I really enjoyed being away with them in Dubai and Kuwait for the last qualifier. It's a really good set-up with good coaches and good medical people, and it's just a wonderful opportunity to mix with the best players and best coaches in the country

While the 2010 FIFA World Cup is always going to be the main focus for the Qantas Socceroos, the AFC Asian Cup 2011 has never been too far away from anyone's thoughts
Well, it's a very important tournament and a few of the guys are a bit disappointed with how Australia performed when it went to the finals last time – and we haven't sealed our qualification yet. It's a big deal and it's important that we do well because Australia holds the No. 1 ranking in the Asian federation.

Has there been any issue among the players that there are virtually two squads for the Qantas Socceroos? One contains the overseas-based players and the other is mainly Australian-based.
We just deal with it and move on. You know you're not going to be part of every squad and we have some very big-name players who are based overseas and who play in some big leagues. You can't expect to be part of the full squad every time, but when you are part of the full squad you make the most of it and really enjoy it

You've had several coaches in your career so far. What's it like playing for the national coach, Pim Verbeek?
Very good. The coach is a straight-shooter, gives you his opinion about what you're doing wrong and what you're doing right, and people appreciate that they know where they stand with him. He's a very good coach from that long line of Dutch coaches who are very strong tactically. It's shown in the good results since he's been here.



FACT FILE

BORN January 11, 1983
CLUB Brisbane Roar
GAMES 106 **GOALS** 15
PREVIOUS CLUBS Brisbane Strikers, Eastern Suburbs, Changchun Yatai (loan)
A-INTERNATIONAL GAMES 3
A-INTERNATIONAL GOALS 0

You had a stint playing overseas in China last year. What was that like?
I played with Changchun Yatai in China and I really enjoyed my time there. They came second in the league and I played the first part of the season, and it was something really different with the culture and the play. It took a little getting used to but, once I was settled, it was brilliant.

How do you think it helped your football?
Getting more game time and being able to adapt are probably the two main things. Playing with players who didn't speak English and obviously with me not speaking Chinese was one thing I dealt with. Then there were the different coaches and the different systems and also having more playing time. The A-League season was just 21 games (long) in the 2008/09 season, so the opportunity to play more games and gain more experience was really helpful and I suppose helped push my case for national selection.

I'm still anxious to improve and to learn more. I want to play at the highest possible level I can.

Are you looking to go overseas again this year?
I'd love to go over again. I'm not sure what's happening just yet, but with my team having made the Champions League, it would be great to go over there and help them out again.

So what are your goals for the next 12 months?
I've still got a year on my contract to go with the Roar, so unless I move, I'd be looking to get another opportunity in Japan or China or another place to learn more. I've just turned 27, but I'm still anxious to improve and to learn more. I want to play at the highest possible level I can.

Back to the Indonesia match. There will be a strong expectation among the fans that Australia gets the three points for the win to seal qualification. Will the approach be one of all-out attack?
We've got to win this game. We played them over there and it was a 0-0 draw. We had some chances and they had some chances, but back at Suncorp with a good surface and a supportive home crowd, the support will be great, so the three points are a must.

Are you confident Australia will make the most of its home advantage tonight?
It's interesting that we (Brisbane) haven't had a good record at home this year. Teams enjoy coming to Suncorp to play and to get a result, so it certainly won't worry most of the guys in our side. They're used to getting a result here and hopefully that will be the case when we play Indonesia. ●

CLUB CHAMPION McKay won the Gary Wilkins Medal as the Roar's best player in 2006/07.

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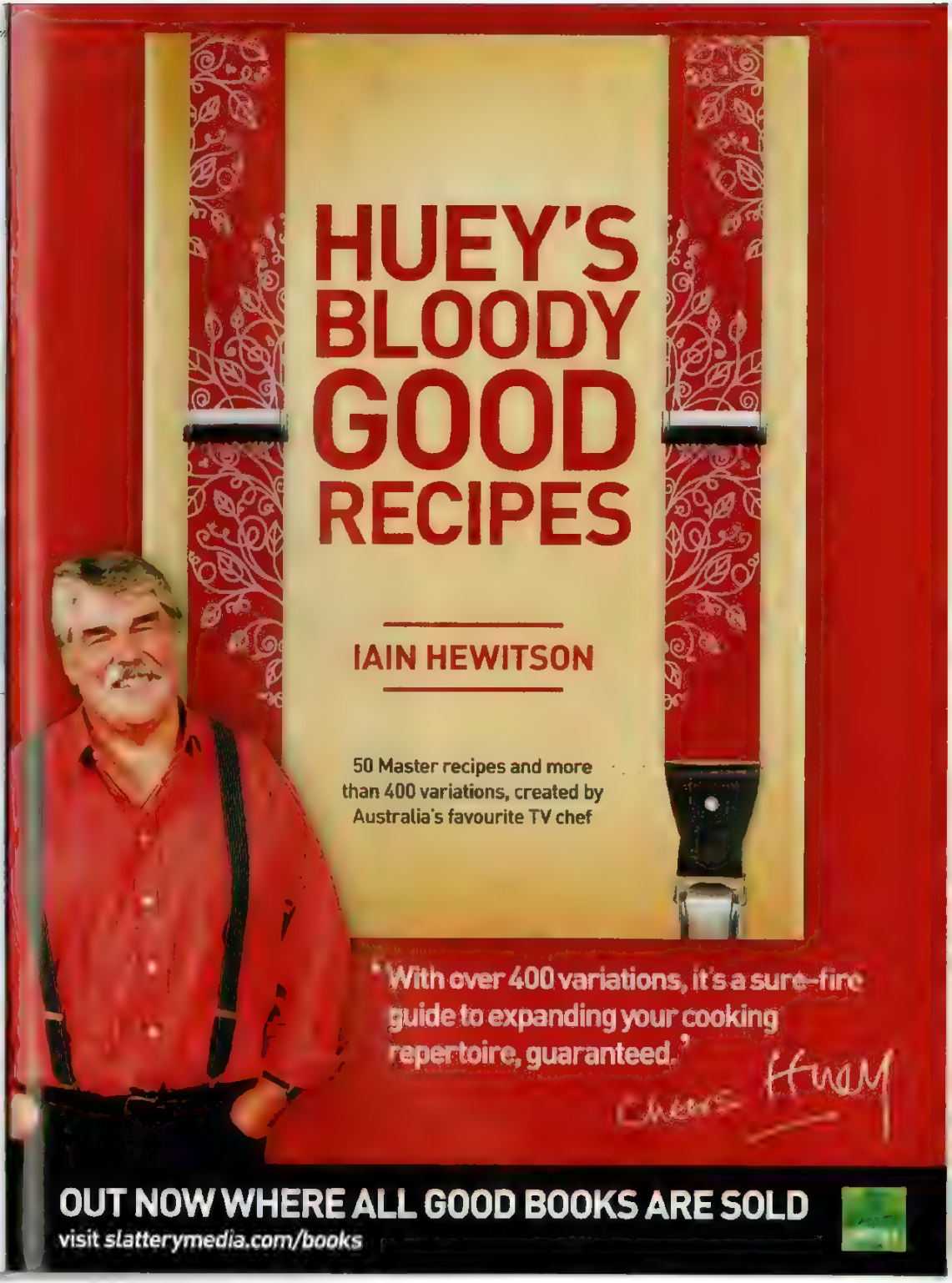


>>> ACTION REPLAY

AUSTRALIA KNVB

QANTAS SOCCEROOS vs. Netherlands

Australia extended its impressive run against the Dutch with a creditable draw on a wet Sydney night. BY JOHN MURRAY

It may be a bit of a stretch to suggest the Qantas Socceroos are the Netherlands' bogey team. However, try as they might, the Dutch just cannot get the better of the Australians.

October's goalless stalemate between the two nations in Sydney means that Australia has never lost to the Netherlands, with a win and two draws from their three meetings.

Truth be told, it was the Dutch who dominated proceedings in front of 40,537 fans on a wet night at Sydney Football Stadium, as the Qantas Socceroos struggled to keep possession in the midfield or create any significant chances. But there was certainly no shame in holding the Netherlands to a draw – they are ranked third in the world and were become the first European country to qualify for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with a 100 per cent record to boot.

For the visitors, it was the first time in 27 matches they had failed to score. And for goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer, it was another clean sheet – his 30th for his country.

AC Milan hitman Klaas Jan Huntelaar sent out some early warning signs to Pim Verbeek's men, first heading over from a cross by Liverpool star Dirk Kuyt. A couple of minutes later, Huntelaar broke free again, but his header – this time from Stijn Schaars' pinpoint cross – failed to trouble Schwarzer.

Kuyt was a constant menace down the right flank, and things became even harder when Vincenzo Grella – the man earmarked to keep a lid on the attacking flair of Wesley Sneijder and co. – limped off with a thigh injury after 16 minutes. He was replaced by Carl Valeri.

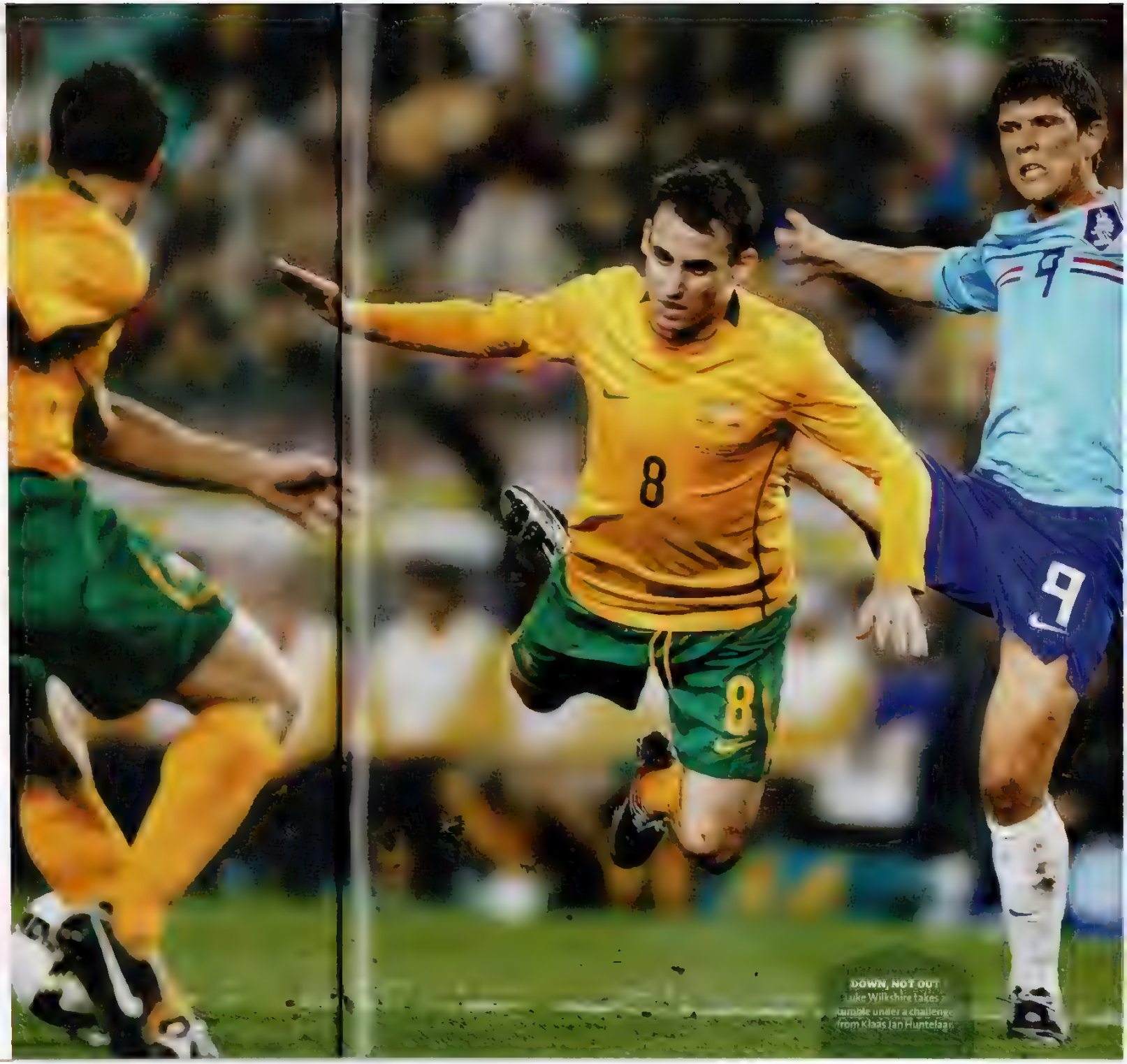
As the Australians regrouped, the increasingly influential Sneijder almost gave the visitors the lead, his shot drawing a save from Schwarzer. In reply, AZ Alkmaar midfielder Brett Holman – against the country where he plays his club football – had a shot that was well saved by Maarten Stekelenburg.

At half-time, perhaps mindful of the AFC Asian qualifier against Oman four days later, Verbeek made three changes, replacing Tim Cahill, Josh Kennedy and Craig Moore with Brett Emerton, Patrick Kisnorbo and Dario Vidosic. It was Emerton's first international outing in more than a year as he returned from a serious knee injury.

The Dutch continued to pile on the pressure, with Eljero Elia, second half substitute Ryan Babel and Huntelaar again having chances to break the deadlock. Yet, as has so often been the case for the Qantas Socceroos, nothing was getting past Schwarzer.

In the dying minutes, Holman had a glorious opportunity to snatch a win against the run of play when he got in behind the Dutch defence. However, his right-foot shot flew high over the bar, and the spoils were shared.

SYDNEY FOOTBALL STADIUM, OCTOBER 10, 2009	
Qantas Socceroos	0
Netherlands	0



DOWN, NOT OUT
Luke Wilkshire takes a tumble under a challenge from Klaas Jan Huntelaar.

>>> ACTION REPLAY

AUSTRALIA

QANTAS SOCCEROOS vs. Oman

HEADS UP
Tim Cahill flies for a header with Omani keeper Ali Ali-Habsi, as Brett Emerton (left) and Josh Kennedy look on.

Australia put its AFC Asian Cup qualifying campaign back on track with a hard-fought win over Oman. BY JOHN MURRAY

After sluggish performances in its opening two games, Australia fired its first shot of the AFC Asian Cup qualifying campaign with a precious 1-0 win over Oman. Tim Cahill, so often Australia's saviour, was again the hero, snatching the only goal of the game just when it looked like Pim Verbeek's men might have to settle for a draw.

The three points launched the Qantas Socceroos from bottom of Group B to equal first, alongside the Kuwaitis.

On a cold night at Etihad Stadium, the home side struggled to warm up the Melbourne crowd as it encountered stubborn resistance from a well drilled Omani outfit.

The Qantas Socceroos began the game positively, enjoying plenty of possession early on, without creating any clear cut chances, as the Omanis made a timid start to the match. Harry Kewell caused havoc down the left flank, and it seemed only a matter of time before an Australian boot got on the end of one of his crosses

However, it was Oman which came closest to breaking the deadlock when Emad Al-Hosni's shot was palmed on to the post by Mark Schwarzer, and rebounded to safety.

Three minutes later, the visitors had an even better chance when Hassan Rabee was put clear by Fawzi Basheer, who was pulling the strings in midfield. Rabee, who scored four goals in Oman's Gulf Cup of Nations triumph last year, could not keep his composure and blazed over.

At the other end, lone striker Josh Kennedy was Australia's main route to goal, his height causing plenty of problems for the Omani defence. He set up Cahill, who shot straight at Bolton Wanderers goalkeeper Ali Al-Habsi, before Kewell's effort flew just wide on the brink of half-time

Once again, the Qantas Socceroos began the second half much brighter than their opponents, and captain Lucas Neill almost headed his team in front from a corner just three minutes into the term. On the hour mark, against the run of play, Ismaeel Al-Ajmi came within a whisker of giving Oman the lead when his shot sailed narrowly wide.

As Oman began to tire, inevitably there was more space for Australia to exploit, and the indefatigable Scott Chipperfield did exactly that when he beat his man on the left wing and crossed into the penalty area. Kennedy's deflected shot fell into the path of Cahill – the man who is always in the right place at the right time – and he slid the ball into the net off the post. It was his 19th goal from 36 internationals.

From there, it was plain sailing for the Qantas Socceroos as they controlled possession to seal a vital first win

ETIHAD STADIUM, OCTOBER 14, 2009	
Qantas Socceroos	1 (Cahill 73')
Oman	0

>>> ACTION REPLAY

AUSTRALIA

Oman vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Despite playing almost 75 minutes with 10 men, the Qantas Socceroos produced a gutsy display to earn a priceless win in Oman. BY JOHN MURRAY

The Qantas Socceroos put one foot in Qatar 2011 after a classic smash-and-grab win in a tough AFC Asian Cup qualifier in Oman. Trailing by a goal and down to 10 men with barely 15 minutes on the clock, Australia produced one of its best performances, and certainly its most defiant, under Pim Verbeek to steal a 2-1 win.

Luke Wilkshire and Brett Emerton were the unlikely goalscorers for the visitors, while Mark Schwarzer once again proved almost impossible to pass, even though the Omanis had 18 attempts at goal, compared to just six for Australia.

The result meant the Qantas Socceroos were sitting in equal-first position in Group B, with Kuwait ahead on goal difference, and Oman three points adrift.

A victory for the visitors, however, seemed unlikely for large parts of the match as the Australians were forced into a rearguard action against Claude Le Roy's men.

The turning point came after a quarter of an hour when Rhys Williams crashed into Omani striker Emad Al-Hosni, who had only Schwarzer to beat. The Middlesbrough defender, making a surprise start at right back after Wilkshire was switched to shore up midfield, was given his marching orders by referee Sun Baojie who pointed to the spot.

Beating Schwarzer with a penalty is far from a foregone conclusion, and so it proved once again when he denied Khalifa Aayel Al-Noafli. However, the Fulham custodian was unable to stop Al-Noafli from forcing home the rebound.

Tim Cahill, who struck the winner in October's contest between the two sides, nearly found the scoresheet again midway through the first term, drawing a decent save from Ali Al-Habsi. But from then on, it was the Omanis who created the best openings, making the most of their extra man, with Al Hosni culpable of the worst miss.

Two minutes before the break, some Mark Bresciano magic put the Qantas Socceroos back on level terms. Out on the right wing, with his back to goal and three opponents at his heels, the Palermo midfielder spun on his left foot and delivered a delightful inswinging cross that Luke Wilkshire bundled in at the far post. It was Wilkshire's first goal for his country.

The match continued a familiar theme in the second half as the Omanis – who had 62 per cent possession for the night – continued to create plenty of openings. Al-Hosni, Hashim Saleh and Ismaeel Al-Ajmi were just three players to squander decent chances.

The Qantas Socceroos hung on manfully and then, with only eight minutes remaining, struck in a classic counter-punch. On a rare foray forward, substitute David Carney found some space down the left wing and crossed for the unmarked Emerton, whose half-volley sneaked inside Al-Habsi's near post.

Three points in the bag. Qualification within sight

MUSCAT, NOVEMBER 14, 2009	
Oman	1 (Al-Noafli 17')
Qantas Socceroos	2 (Wilkshire 43', Emerton 82')

UNLIKELY HERO Brett Emerton snatched the three points for Australia with a late winner.

PHOTO: AAP/AP/GUSTAVO TERRARI

>>> ACTION REPLAY

Kuwait vs. QANTAS SOCCEROOS

AUSTRALIA

After an explosive start, the Qantas Socceroos were forced to share the spoils in a hard-fought clash with Kuwait.

BY JOHN MURRAY

The Qantas Socceroos moved to the cusp of AFC Asian Cup qualification after an entertaining 2-2 draw in Kuwait. In March last year, it was the Kuwaitis who derailed Australia's campaign with a shock 1-0 win in Canberra against a team made up entirely of Hyundai A-League players.

Ten months on, the Qantas Socceroos – once more fielding mainly home-based players would not be caught off guard again. And this time, it was their turn to shock their opponents.

Just three minutes had passed at Kuwait Stadium when Luke Wilkshire ran on to Mile Jedinak's knockdown to fire the Australians ahead. It was his second goal for his country in as many games. A couple of minutes later, the lead had doubled. Kuwait failed to clear a free kick and defender Dean Heffernan reacted quicker than anyone else to lash the ball home.

For the next 20 minutes, the Qantas Socceroos seemed likely to extend their advantage even further, while the home side failed to create any moments of concern for central defensive duo Simon Colosimo and Craig Moore, or Adelaide United's Eugene Galekovic in goal.

Wilkshire and Jedinak impressed in the middle of the ground, while young striker Dario Vidosic was a constant threat further forward.

The introduction of substitute Hamid Al Enezi after 25 minutes provided a much-needed catalyst for Kuwait. He caused problems down both flanks and, when Colosimo failed to deal with a long ball over the top, Al Enezi halved the deficit when he beat Galekovic from close range five minutes before the break.

Just as the Qantas Socceroos had done at the start of the half, Kuwait scored twice in quick succession. On the stroke of half-time, Bader Al Mutwa dissected the Australian defence with a sublime through ball, and Yousuf Nasser did the rest.

Buoyed on by their first-half fightback, the Kuwaitis had the better of the second term as the Qantas Socceroos struggled to find any rhythm on the poor playing surface. Saleh Al Hendi and Al Enezi both went close to putting the home team in front, before Nikita Rukavytsya – a second-half substitute for Mile Sterjovski – drew a save at the other end from Nawaf Al Khaldi.

As the match reached its closing stages, it was Al Enezi again who almost broke the deadlock. Cutting in from the left-hand side of the penalty area, his low shot drew a sharp save from Galekovic, ensuring the teams would share the points.

The result means the Qantas Socceroos need just a point against Indonesia tonight to guarantee their place in Qatar for next year's AFC Asian Cup.

KUWAIT CITY, JANUARY 6, 2010	
Kuwait	2 (Al Enezi 40', Nasser 44')
Qantas Socceroos	2 (Wilkshire 3', Heffernan 5')

ON THE ATTACK: Archie Thompson was deployed as a lone striker against Kuwait.

PHOTO: AAP/AFP/MOHAMMAD MAHJOUB

AUSSIES ABROAD

All the latest news on Australians overseas. BY MICHAEL LYNCH

It wouldn't be a FIFA World Cup year without a medical scare for **Harry Kewell**. The mercurial midfielder cum-striker has had an injury-plagued career which has, for most of the past six years, prevented him from consistently scaling the heights he did as a young man with Leeds United in the early years of the century.

Even in Australia's very own wonder year, 2006, Kewell's fragility was a major issue for the team. He scored the crucial equalising goal in that memorable 2-2 draw with Croatia in Stuttgart which propelled Australia into the knockout phase of the FIFA World Cup, but that was his last involvement, as injury again forced him to sit on the sidelines as Australia succumbed in heartbreaking fashion to Italy.

Kewell was back in Sydney about a month ago for treatment on a groin problem which had prevented him from turning out for his Turkish club, Galatasaray, since December last year. Initially there were fears that it was another problem with his adductor, an injury which had so blighted his time at Liverpool. Had that been the case he could have been out for months and his FIFA World Cup participation in real jeopardy, something that would have been a body blow to the Qantas Socceroos' prospects.

BORO BOYE Rhys Williams has been joined by Scott McDonald at Middlesbrough.

Kewell is expected to return to action for his club this month after recuperation for what has been described as a groin injury. All being well he will have a couple of months to regain match fitness and the kind of sharpness that will be required in South Africa.

Injury aside, Turkey has been a good move for Australia's best-known player. Since leaving the hurly burly of the English Premiership, he has been in fine form, scoring and playing regularly for the country's biggest club. At international level, he has constantly reaffirmed his importance to the team and there is plenty of speculation that he could be used instead of **Josh Kennedy** in the lone striker role so favoured by coach Pim Verbeek.

Now, of course, he has been joined by his national team colleague **Lucas Neill**, who joined him in Turkey during the January transfer window. It has been a hectic nine months for Neill, who was training on his own when the English season began in August, before eventually joining Everton. His stay on Merseyside, alongside international teammate **Tim Cahill**, was short-lived as he moved on to Turkey after a few months with the Toffees.

Cahill, who joined the rank of the 30-somethings in December, has had another impressive campaign with Everton. The Sydneysider has never lost that critical ability to arrive late in the penalty area and score vital goals, as he showed once more in the Toffees' recent wins against Sunderland and Wigan.

His manager David Moyes was quick to pay tribute to the role he plays with the Blues: "We know that he's always come up with important goals for us at Everton. That's what he's done over the years," Moyes declared last month after Cahill had got the only goal of the game away to Wigan.

The other member of Australia's 'big four', goalkeeper **Mark Schwarzer**, continues to impress for Fulham. While the Cottagers are not quite scaling the heights they did in the Premiership last year, they are in a comfortable position and have made good progress in the FA Cup and Europa Cup, their first tilt at continental competition. Schwarzer has won rave reviews from the English critics since joining Fulham at the start of the 2008/09 campaign and, despite the fact that he is in his late 30s, is in career-best form.

FOX IN THE BOX Tim Cahill celebrates a goal against Spurs with teammate Leighton Baines.

The 2009/10 season has been an important campaign for **Brett Emerton** as it has marked his comeback from the serious knee injury which sidelined him for more than six months. He has been a regular feature in the Blackburn line-up since his return as the club continues to climb up the Premiership table.

His Qantas Socceroo teammate **Vincenzo Grella**, has had an up-and-down time at Rovers since moving to the Premiership after many years in Italy. A niggling and frustrating run of injuries has prevented him from a long settled run of games in the midfield, and he has missed some Qantas Socceroos matches as well.

Further north, **Scott McDonald** has a new home after he moved to Middlesbrough from Celtic for a reported fee of $7 million. Despite scoring 14 goals for the Bhoys this season, he could not be guaranteed first-team football by manager Tony Mowbray. McDonald netted 64 times in 127 games for Celtic.

He joins young Australian teammate, **Rhys Williams**, at Middlesbrough. The defender has been getting plenty of game time with the team that was relegated to the Championship last season and is in contention for a play-off spot.

Elsewhere in the lower English leagues, several Australians have impressed, none more so than **Patrick Kisnorbo**, the centre back who has been a key member of the Leeds United side pushing for promotion from League One to the Championship. He has recently been joined at Elland Road by another Qantas Socceroo defensive candidate in youngster **Shane Lowry**, who moved to Yorkshire on loan from Aston Villa. Kisnorbo's finest hour came when he played a crucial role in Leeds' stunning 1-0 FA Cup win over Manchester United at Old Trafford in the third round of the competition.

Kewell was in Sydney about a month ago for treatment on a groin problem.

Matthew Spiranovic, the young centre half from Geelong, is one of several Australians who made loan moves in the January transfer window to try to boost their chances of getting the regular game time needed to make the 2010 FIFA World Cup squad. He went from Bundesliga club FC Nurnberg to Japanese giant Urawa Red Diamonds. **Dario Vidosic** followed suit, the 22-year-old leaving Nurnberg for a loan period at MSV Duisburg, which is pushing for promotion to Germany's top tier.

Vidosic's fellow striker **Nikita Rukavytsya** is another who has followed Verbeek's advice and sought first-team football elsewhere, leaving high-flying Dutch club FC Twente to play at Belgian side KSV Roeselare on loan.

Going nowhere, however, is Russian-based utility **Luke Wilkshire**, a man who has become a key member of Verbeek's strongest starting 11 in the last 12 months. Wilkshire has signed a contract extension to stay with Dynamo Moscow. ●

Saving the Day

Reading might be having a tough time in the English Championship this season, but it's been a different story in the FA Cup. There have been many unlikely heroes in the history of England's most famous knockout competition, and Australian Adam Federici joined the list with some stunning performances against Premiership giant Liverpool in January. In the process, he threw up a glove for a spot in Pim Verbeek's squad on the plane to South Africa. Now established as the Royals' No. 1 keeper, the 25-year-old denied the Reds not once, but twice as Reading spectacularly bundled Liverpool out of the FA Cup. First he helped Reading hold out for a 1-1 draw at home, then in the replay at Anfield, another inspired performance was crucial in his team's last-gasp 2-1 win. Later in January, Federici was at it again, keeping a clean sheet as the Royals ended the FA Cup dream of another Premiership outfit – this time, Burnley. Federici clearly impressed the opposition scouts: he was linked with a move to Liverpool in the January transfer window.

CUP KING Adam Federici has [illegible] to the FA Cup quarter-final.

RESULTS & FIXTURES

Qantas Socceroos' results and confirmed fixtures from January 1, 2009, to July 31, 2010.

2011 AFC ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Indonesia 0
Australia 0
January 28, 2009

Australia 0
Kuwait 1
Canberra Stadium, Canberra
March 5, 2009

Australia 1
Oman 0
Etihad Stadium, Melbourne
October 14, 2009

Oman 1
Australia 2
Muscat
November 14, 2009

Kuwait 2
Australia 2
Kuwait City
January 6, 2010

Australia v Indonesia
Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane
March 3, 2010

2010 FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Japan 0
Australia 0
Yokohama International Stadium, Yokohama
February 11, 2009

Australia 2
Uzbekistan 0
ANZ Stadium, Sydney
April 1, 2009

Qatar 0
Australia 0
Doha
June 6, 2009

Australia 2
Bahrain 0
ANZ Stadium, Sydney
June 10, 2009

Australia 2
Japan 1
MCG, Melbourne
June 17, 2009

2010 FIFA WORLD CUP GROUP D

Germany v Australia
Durban, South Africa
June 13, 2010

Ghana v Australia
Rustenburg, South Africa
June 19, 2010

Australia v Serbia
Nelspruit, South Africa
June 23, 2010

Note: the round of 16 will begin on June 26, 2010, with fixtures to be determined after the completion of the group stages.

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES

Republic of Ireland 0
Australia 3
August 12, 2009

Korea Republic 3
Australia 1
Seoul
September 5, 2009

Australia 0
Netherlands 0
Sydney Football Stadium
October 10, 2009

Australia v New Zealand
MCG, Melbourne
May 24, 2010

OUT OF AFRICA
Ghana will be Australia's second opponent at the FIFA World Cup

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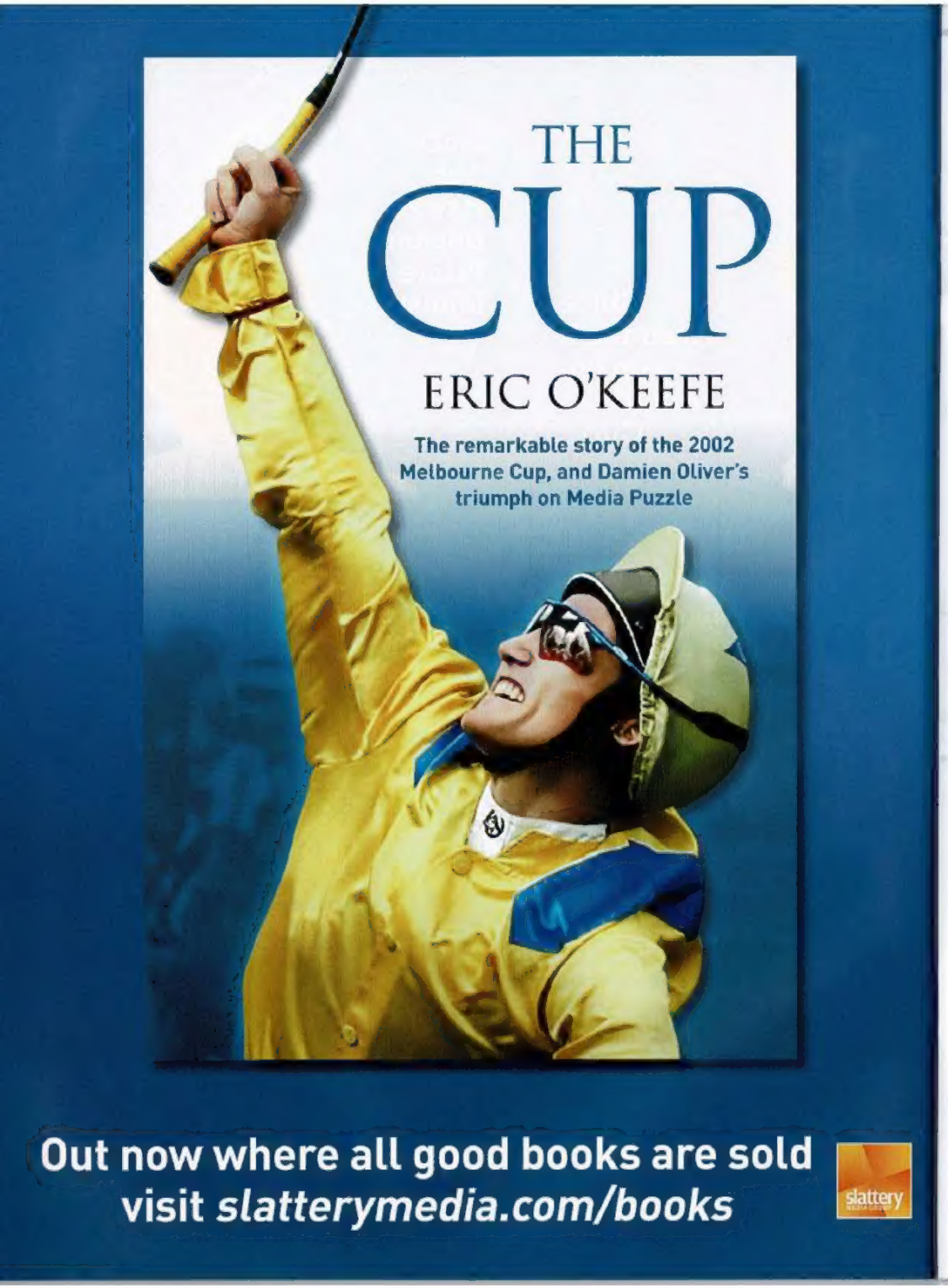


ON THE SPOT

Test your knowledge and skills

Reckon you know a thing or two about the Qantas Socceroos? Take this quiz and all will be revealed.

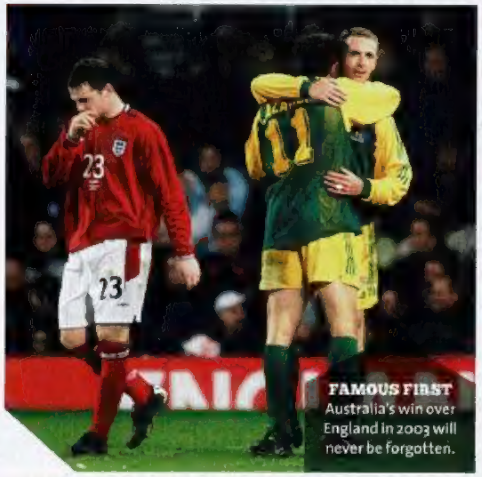
1 Which of these three players has won the most caps for Australia?
A. Mark Viduka
B. Harry Kewell
C. Brett Emerton

2 Who scored Australia's first goal against England in its 3-1 win in 2003?
A. Tony Popovic
B. Harry Kewell
C. Brett Emerton

3 Against which country did striker Josh Kennedy score his first international goal?
A. Japan
B. Latvia
C. Liechtenstein

4 Which referee gave Croatia's Josip Simunic three yellow cards in the 2006 FIFA World Cup clash with Australia?
A. Pierluigi Collina
B. Graham Poll
C. Anders Frisk

5 In which country was Nikita Rukavytsya born?
A. Russia
B. Ukraine
C. Australia



FAMOUS FIRST Australia's win over England in 2003 will never be forgotten.

6 Who is Australia's all-time leading goalscorer?
A. Tim Cahill
B. John Aloisi
C. Damian Mori

7 Which Australian star plays in Switzerland?
A. Luke Wilkshire
B. Lucas Neill
C. Scott Chipperfield

8 Who was Australia's third goalkeeper at the 2006 FIFA World Cup alongside Mark Schwarzer and Zeljko Kalac?
A. Ante Covic
B. Bradley Jones
C. Mark Bosnich

9 Who wore No. 23 for the Qantas Socceroos in that tournament?
A. Mark Milligan
B. Mark Bresciano
C. Michael Beauchamp

10 Which nation did Australia defeat to claim third in the 2001 FIFA Confederations Cup?
A. Brazil
B. France
C. Japan

11 With which Hyundai A-League club did Joel Griffiths win a premiership?
A. Sydney FC
B. Newcastle Jets
C. Melbourne Victory

12 Who replaced Terry Venables as Australia's coach in 1998?
A. Frank Farina
B. Raul Blanco
C. Les Scheinflug

13 Which country knocked Australia out of the 2007 AFC Asian Cup?
A. Iraq
B. Oman
C. Japan

14 In what year did Craig Moore win his first Scottish Premier League title with Rangers?
A. 1993
B. 1994
C. 1995

15 How many goals did Archie Thompson score against American Samoa in 2001?
A. 11
B. 13
C. 15

16 Who captained Australia against Argentina in the 1994 FIFA World Cup qualifying play-off?
A. Alex Tobin
B. Paul Okon
C. Paul Wade

17 Who scored Australia's first goal of its 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign?
A. Josh Kennedy
B. Tim Cahill
C. Mark Bresciano

18 And who scored Australia's last goal of the qualifying campaign?
A. Tim Cahill
B. Jason Culina
C. Craig Moore

19 Which was the first English club Australian captain Lucas Neill played for?
A. Blackburn
B. West Ham
C. Millwall

20 Who scored Australia's only goal in the first leg of the 2002 FIFA World Cup qualifying play-off against Uruguay?
A. Mark Viduka
B. Stan Lazaridis
C. Kevin Muscat

MAKING HIS MARK Is Mark Viduka Australia's most experienced player?

BY THE STATS

Qantas Socceroos statistics

0 defeats in three games against the Netherlands

0 previous games against Serbia, Australia's third opponent in Group D at the 2010 FIFA World Cup

1 Australian international who has played in the UEFA Champions League this season (Brett Holman for AZ Alkmaar)

1 debutant (Melbourne Victory's Matthew Kemp) for Australia against Kuwait in January

2 goals in as many games for Luke Wilkshire after not scoring in his first 37 appearances for the Qantas Socceroos

4 players who have scored for Australia at the FIFA World Cup

4 wins from six previous meetings with Ghana, one of Australia's Group D opponents in South Africa

4 Australians on the books at Greek club AO Kavala after Craig Moore left Brisbane Roar to join up with Zeljko Kalac, Robert Stambolziev and Paul Giannou

6 Australian internationals who play club football in Turkey (Bruce Djite, Mile Jedinak, Harry Kewell, Lucas Neill, Michael Petkovic, James Troisi)

6 Hyundai A-League players in Australia's starting line-up against Kuwait in January

7 games played by Australia in the history of the FIFA World Cup

7 goals scored between Australia and Germany (first-up 2010 FIFA World Cup opponent) when the nations last met in 2005 – the Germans won 4-3

16 clean sheets since Pim Verbeek took charge of Australia

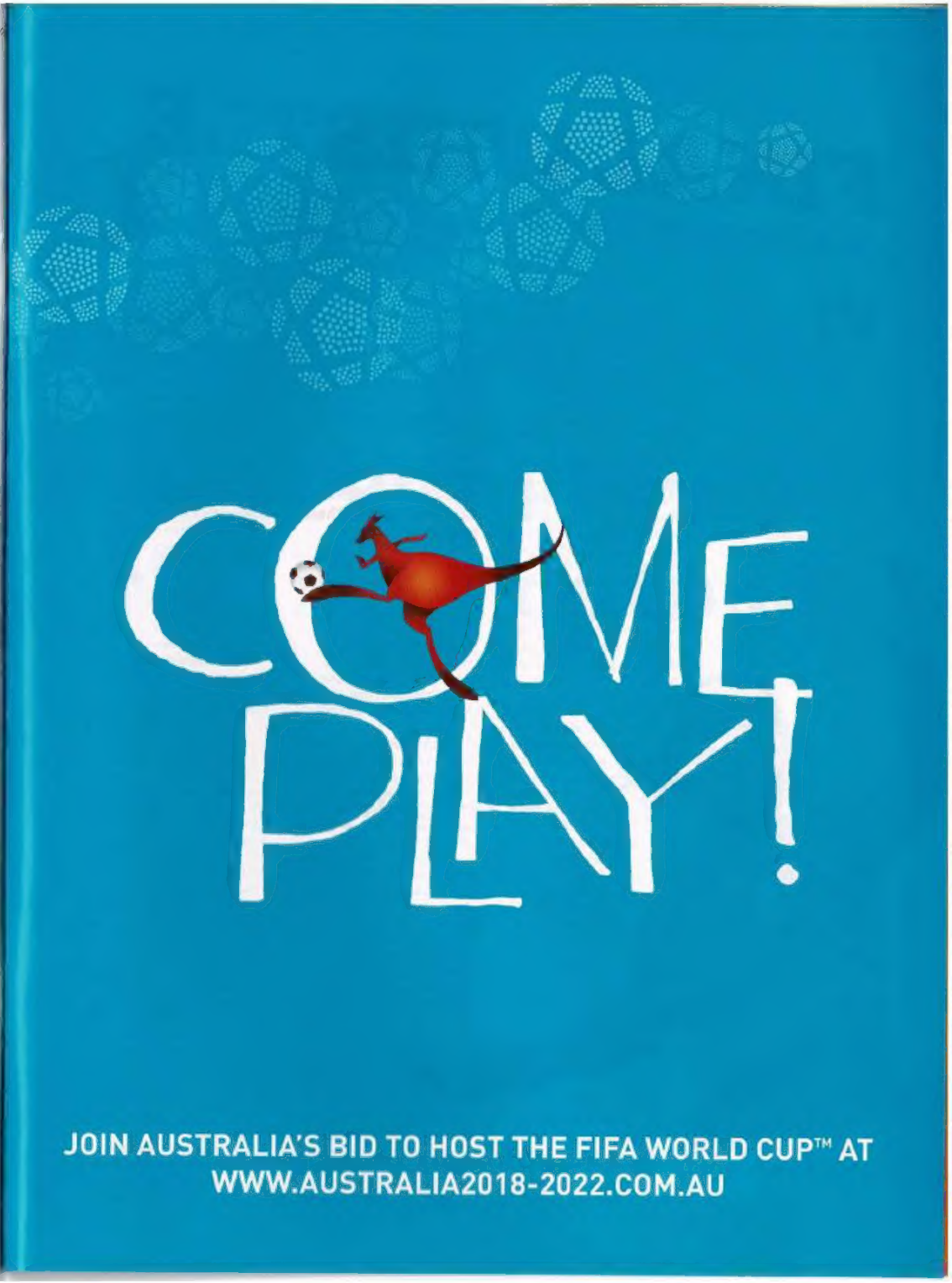
19 countries in the 2010 FIFA World Cup ranked higher than the Qantas Socceroos, according to the February FIFA world rankings (12 countries have a lower ranking)

26 games in a row in which the Netherlands had scored – until they were held to a goalless draw by the Qantas Socceroos in October

42 cabins in the secluded Kloofzicht Lodge, 45 minutes from Johannesburg, that will be Australia's base camp for the 2010 FIFA World Cup

54 per cent winning record under Pim Verbeek (Australia's record is: 14 wins, 8 draws, 4 losses)

FIRST-TIMER Melbourne Victory's Matthew Kemp made his Qantas Socceroo debut against Kuwait in January.



FINAL WHISTLE

Challenging Times

Asian countries have provided stiffer opposition to Australia than many had anticipated. BY MICHAEL LYNCH

With all due respect to tonight's opponent Indonesia, few people would have thought when the draw was made for the AFC Asian Cup qualifying section that Australia, one of the footballing powerhouses of the region, would go into the last match needing a result to qualify.

It was widely felt that, even with a mixture of locally based players and some of the lesser-known overseas professionals, Pim Verbeek's team would have enough grunt to make it past Kuwait, the Indonesians and Oman. But that has proved a severe misjudgment.

Asia – as football professionals know full well – was always going to be a tough assignment and far harder than it might have looked on paper. The travel, logistics, heat, humidity and less than perfect ground conditions present the sort of challenge that even highly experienced players find difficult to meet.

A struggling goalless draw with Indonesia in the heat and humidity of Jakarta last January – the opening game of this qualifying tournament in which a team of Hyundai A-League players represented their country – set the scene. An even bigger reality check came two months later when Kuwait won 1-0 in Canberra, leaving Verbeek's team up against it in the race to secure one of the top two positions in the group.

After that shaky start, Australia hauled itself back into contention with the help of the European-based first teamers, notching two hard-fought wins against Oman. Then in the return leg against Kuwait, after taking a 2-0 lead inside five minutes, they were pegged back to 2-2 by the interval and spent much of the second half hanging on for a draw.

ON TARGET
Japan's Marcus Tulio Tanaka was the only man to score against Australia in the 2010 FIFA World Cup final qualifying stage.

It was a similar story in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. The statistics might have indicated that Australia breezed through both sets of qualifying groups, but they didn't tell the whole truth. Iraq provided plenty of problems in Brisbane, and beat the Qantas Socceroos 1-0 in Dubai in June 2008.

There should be no illusions about the task that awaits them in Qatar.

Bahrain dominated the majority of the match against Australia in Manama in November 2008 and should have taken the points. It was only the cruellest of misfortunes for the home team (and sharp finishing by Mark Bresciano) that allowed Australia to sneak off with a 1-0 win.

Tough it might be, but the move to Asia is clearly a bonus for the game in this country. It ensures regular competition at international level with no guaranteed wins, as was the case when the Qantas Socceroos regularly beat up on Pacific Island minnows in the Oceania federation. It also gives Australia the chance to build up meaningful rivalries with countries in its region.

The drama-charged FIFA World Cup game in Kaiserslautern in June 2006, when Australia came from behind to beat Japan 3-1, was a watershed event in the sporting history of the two countries.

It added piquancy to the two meetings between the nations in the recent FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign when they shared the spoils in Yokohama before Australia triumphed 2-1 at the MCG. Although that game last June was a dead rubber, plenty of pride or 'face' was at stake.

The Japanese might have lost, but Marcus Tulio Tanaka's header gave them the distinction of becoming the first team to have scored against Mark Schwarzer in the final phase of the qualifying tournament.

Asian teams might not have the strength and size of the Australian side, but they make up for it with their pace and often superior technique. And with the money at their disposal – particularly the oil rich countries of the Middle East – their national football federations have the sort of cash available to lure quality foreign coaches and trainers.

Governments throughout the region are also not slow to recognise that success on the football field can add to their country's prestige and standing, so many are keen to invest in the development of stadia and sporting infrastructure to help speed the game's growth. The fan base, too, is huge and growing: one can only imagine what it might be like in China one day should football become the biggest sport there.

But that is in the future. Right now, the challenge for Australia is to avoid defeat to Indonesia tonight. Should the Qantas Socceroos seal qualification with a win or draw, there should be no illusions about the difficulty of the task that awaits them in Qatar for the AFC Asian Cup in January 2011.

The Australians only have to remember what happened at the AFC Asian Cup 2007, when they lost to Iraq and then struggled to a draw with Oman, to refresh their minds.

With four years experience under their belt, the Qantas Socceroos are not likely to make the same mistake again. ●

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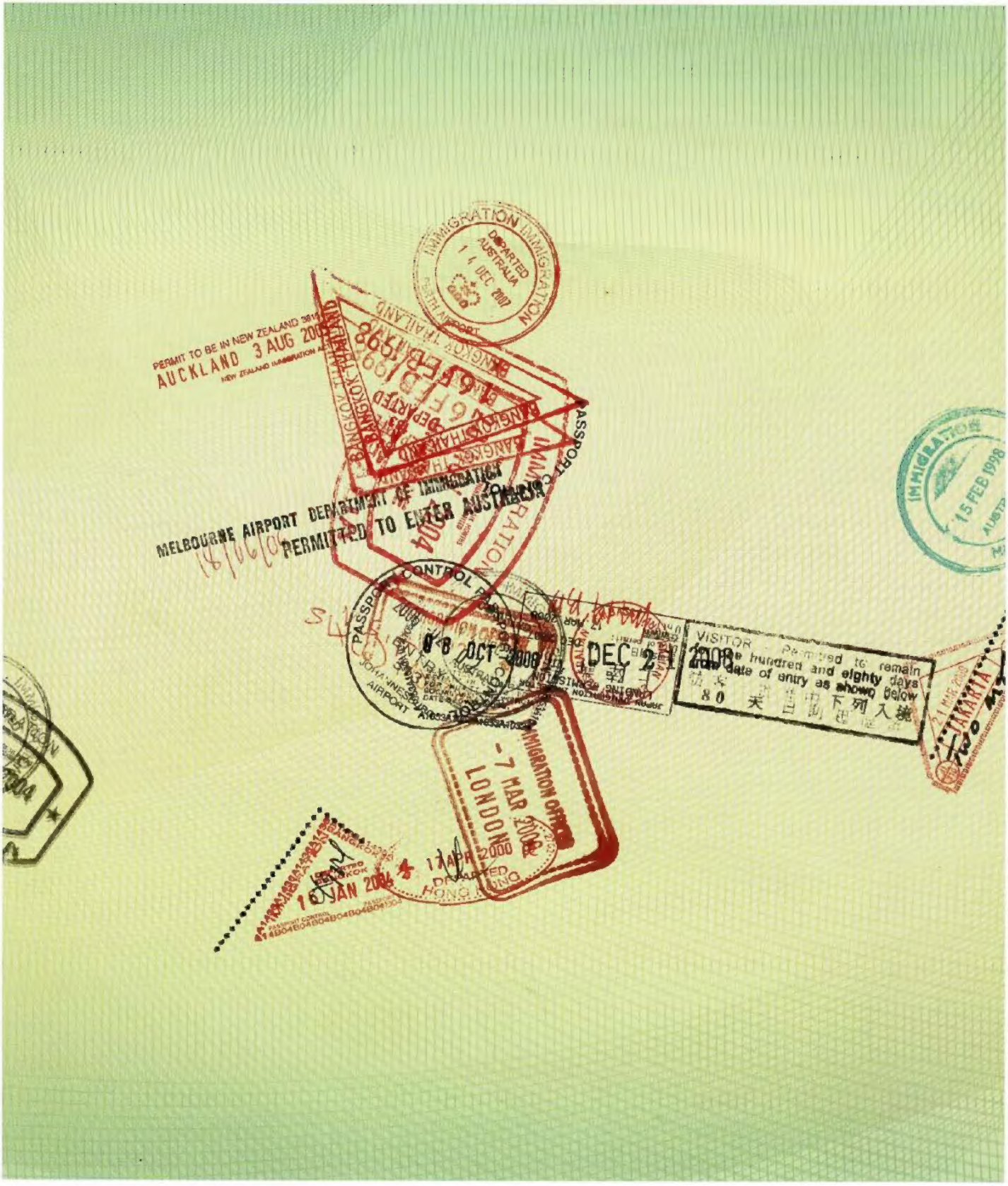

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